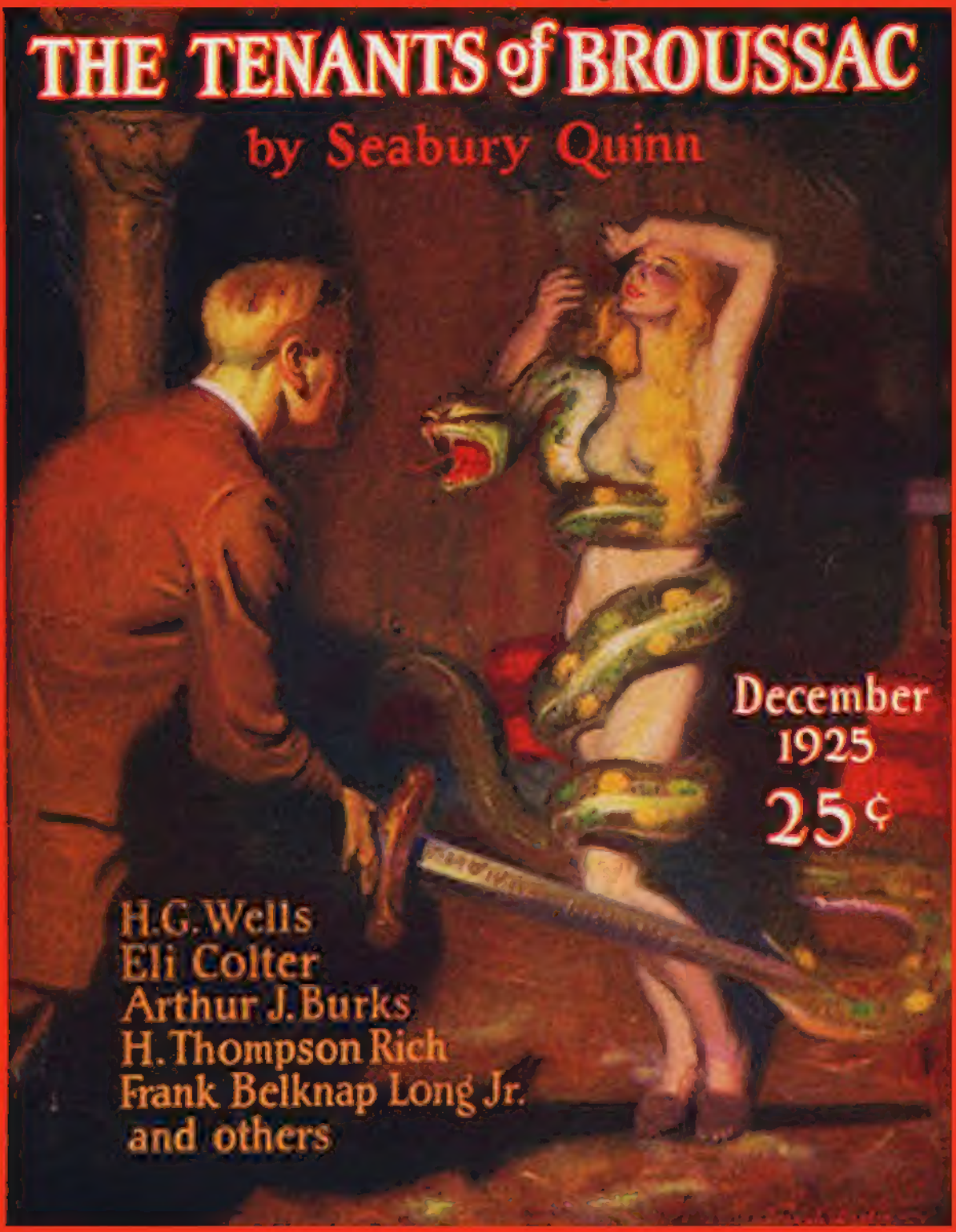
Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine



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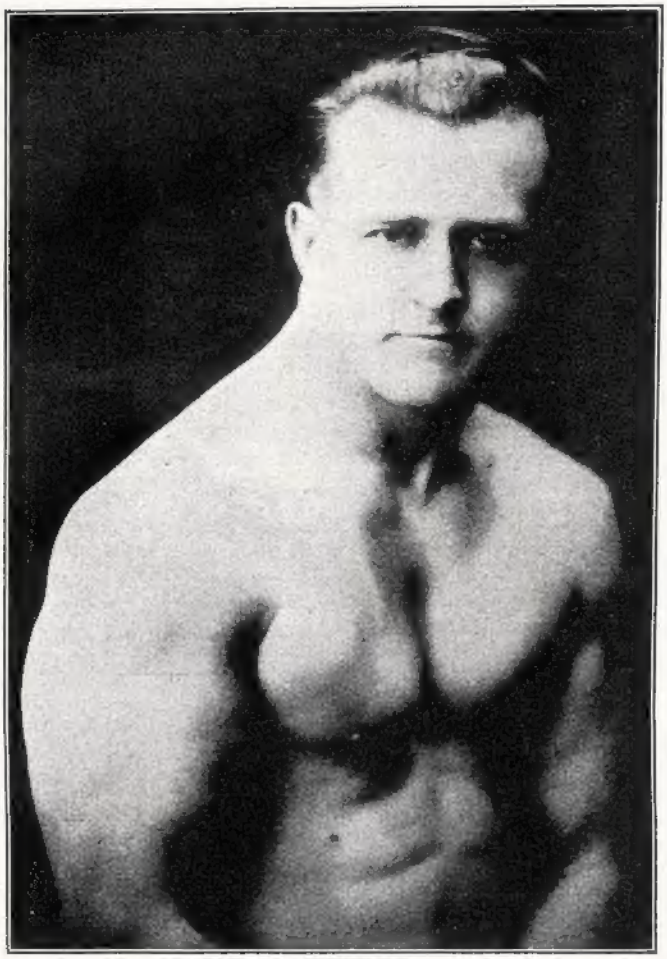

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN,
America's Leading Director of Physical Education

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That's what you need and that's what you get. Come on now, pull in your belt and throw out your chest. Take a good deep breath of that pure air that's all about you. Give your heart a treat with some rich blood. You will feel so good you will think it's your birthday. Drop me a line and I'll show you how to do it. I'm going to put a chest on you that will make your old ribs strain with the pressure. I'm going to change those skinny arms and legs of yours to a real man's size. You will have the strength and vitality to do things you never thought possible. Come on fellows! Get busy. I don't promise these things—I guarantee them. Are you with me?

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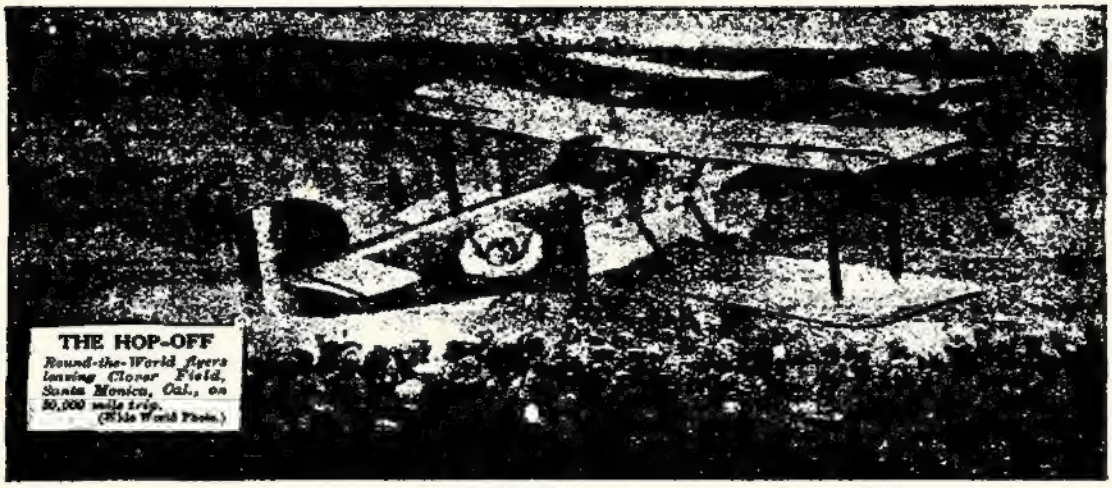

THE HOP-OFF
Round-the-World flyers leaving Clover Field, Santa Monica, Cal., on 30,000 mile trip.
(Wide World Photo.)

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Weird Tales

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VOLUME VI NUMBER 6

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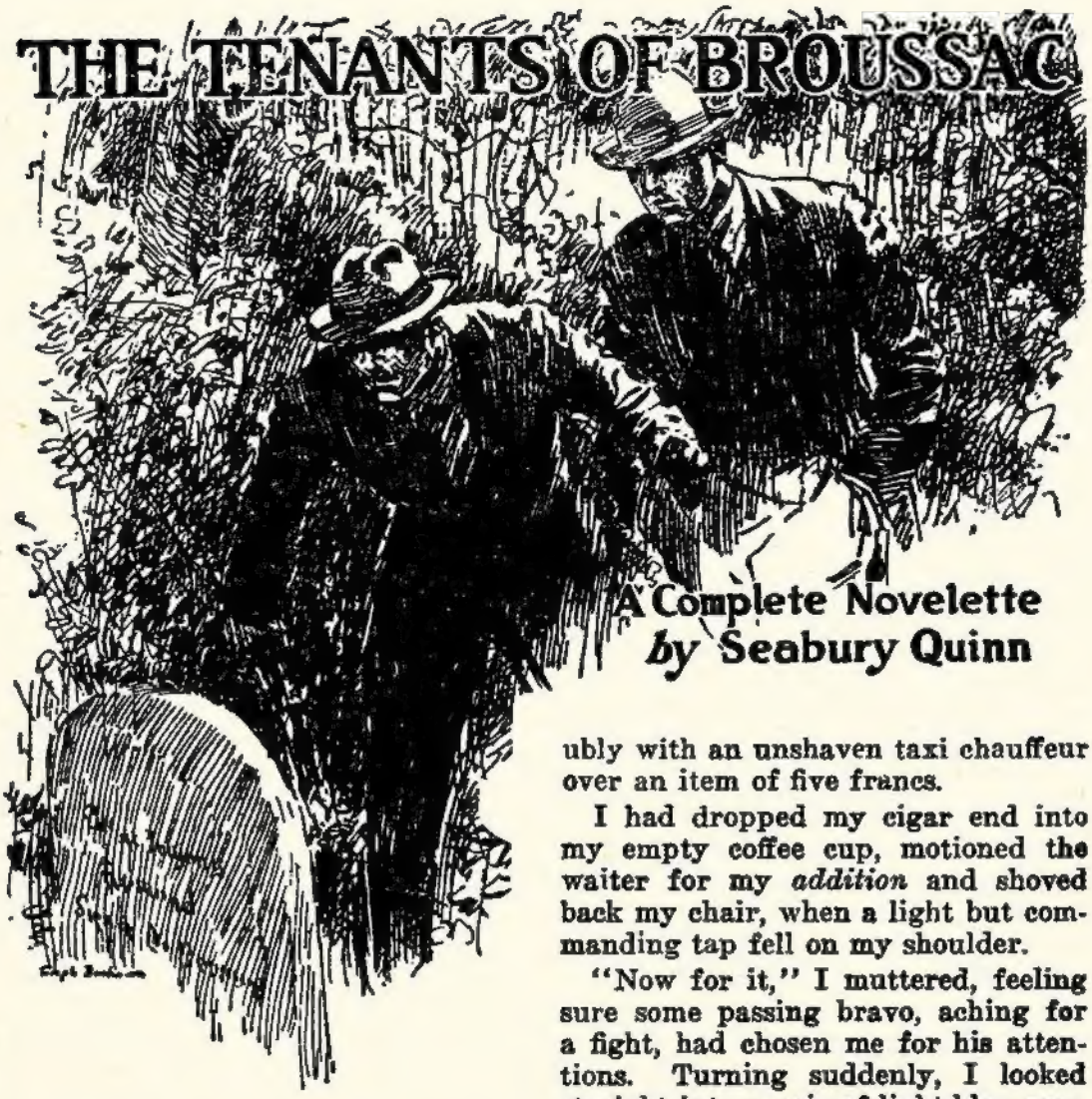

A Complete Novelette by Seabury Quinn

THE Rue des Batailles was justifying its name. From my table on the narrow sidewalk before the Café de Liberté I could view three distinct fights alternately, or simultaneously. Two cock-sparrows contended noisily for possession of a wisp of straw, a girl with unbelievably small feet and incredibly thick ankles addressed a flood of gamin abuse to an oily-haired youth who wore a dirty black-silk muffler in lieu of a collar. At the curb a spade-bearded patron, considerably the worse for *vin ordinaire,* haggled volubly with an unshaven taxi chauffeur over an item of five francs.

I had dropped my cigar end into my empty coffee cup, motioned the waiter for my *addition* and shoved back my chair, when a light but commanding tap fell on my shoulder.

"Now for it," I muttered, feeling sure some passing bravo, aching for a fight, had chosen me for his attentions. Turning suddenly, I looked straight into a pair of light-blue eyes, round as a cat's, and just missing a humorous expression because of their challenging directness. Beneath the eyes was a straw-colored mustache, trimly waxed into a horizontal line and bristling so belligerently as to heighten its wearer's resemblance to a truculent tom-cat. Below the feline mustache was a grin wider and friendlier than any I'd seen in Paris.

"Par la barbe d'un bouc vert!" swore my accoster. "If it is not truly my friend, the good Dr. Trowbridge, then I am first cousin to the Emperor of China."

"Why, de Grandin," I exclaimed, grasping his small sinewy hand, "fancy meeting you this way! I called at the *Ecole de Médecine* the day after I arrived, but they told me you were off on one of your wild goose chases and only heaven knew when you'd be back."

He tweaked the points of his mustache alternately as he answered with another grin. "But of course! Those dull-witted ones would term my researches in the domain of inexact science a wild goose hunt. *Pardieu!* They have no vision beyond their test tubes and retorts, those ones."

"What is it this time?" I asked as we caught step. "A criminal investigation or a ghost-breaking expedition?"

"*Morbleu!*" he answered with a chuckle; "I think, perhaps, it is a little of both. Listen, my friend, do you know the country about Rouen?"

"Not I," I replied. "This is my first trip to France, and I've been here only three days."

"Ah, yes," he returned, "your ignorance of our geography is truly deplorable; but it can be remedied. Have you an inflexible program mapped out?"

"No. This is my first vacation in ten years, and I've made no plans, except to get as far away from medicine as possible."

"Good!" he applauded. "I can promise you a complete change from your American practise, my friend, such a change as will banish all thoughts of patients, pills and prescriptions entirely from your head. Will you join me?"

"Hm, that depends," I temporized. "What sort of case are you working on?" Discretion was the better part of acceptance when talking with Jules de Grandin, I knew. Educated for the profession of medicine, one of the foremost anatomists and physiologists of his generation, and a shining light in the University of Paris faculty, this restless, energetic little scientist had chosen criminology and occult investigation as a recreation from his vocational work, and had gained almost as much fame in these activities as he had in the medical world. During the war he had been a prominent, though necessarily anonymous, member of the Allied Intelligence Service, since the Armistice he had penetrated nearly every quarter of the globe on special missions for the French Ministry of Justice. It behooved me to move cautiously when he invited me to share an exploit with him; the trail might lead to India, Greenland or Tierra del Fuego before the case was closed.

"*Eh bien,*" he laughed. "You are ever the old cautious one, Friend Trowbridge. Never will you commit yourself until you have seen blueprints and specifications of the enterprize. Very well, then, listen:

"Near Rouen stands the very ancient château of the de Broussac family. Parts of it were built as early as the Eleventh Century; none of it is less than two hundred years old. The family has dwindled steadily in wealth and importance until the last two generations have been reduced to living on the income derived from renting the château to wealthy foreigners.

"A common story, *n'est-ce-pas?* Very well, wait, comes now the uncommon part: Within the past year the Château Broussac has had no less than six tenants; no renter has remained in possession for more than two months, and each tenancy has terminated in a tragedy of some sort.

"Stories of this kind get about; houses acquire unsavory reputations, even as people do, and tenants are becoming hard to find for the château. Monsieur Bergeret, the de

Broussac family's *avoué,* has commissioned me to discover the reason for these interrupted tenancies; he desires me to build a dam against the flood of ill fortune which makes tenants scarce at the château and threatens to pauperize one of the oldest and most useless families of France."

"You say the tenancies were terminated by tragedies?" I asked, more to make conversation than from interest.

"But yes," he answered. "The cases, as I have their histories, are like this:

"Monsieur Alvarez, a wealthy Argentine cattle raiser, rented the château last April. He moved in with his family, his servants and entirely too many cases of champagne. He had lived there only about six weeks when, one night, such of the guests as retained enough soberness to walk to bed missed him at the good-night round of drinks. He was also missing the following morning, and the following night. Next day a search was instituted, and a servant found his body in the chapel of the oldest part of the château. *Morbleu,* all the doctors in France could not reassemble him! Literally, my friend, he was strewn about the sanctuary; his limbs torn off, his head severed most untidily at the neck, every bone in his trunk smashed like crockery in a china store struck by lightning. He was like a doll pulled to pieces by a peevish child. *Voilà,* the Alvarez family decamped the premises and the Van Brundt family moved in.

"That Monsieur Van Brundt had amassed a fortune selling supplies to the *sale Boche* during the war. *Eh bien,* I could not wish him the end he had. Too much food, too much wine, too little care of his body he took. One night he rose from his bed and wandered in the château grounds. In the place where the ancient moat formerly was they found him, his thick body thin at last, and almost twice its natural length—squeezed out like a tube of *crème* from a lady's dressing table trodden under foot by an awkward servant. He was not a pretty sight, my friend.

"The other tenants, too, all left when some member of their families or suites met a terrifying fate. There was Simpson, the Englishman, whose crippled son fell from the battlements to the old courtyard, and Biddle, the American, whose wife now shrieks and drools in a madhouse, and Muset, the banker from Montreal, who woke one night from a doze in his study chair to see Death staring him in the eye.

"Now Monsieur Luke Bixby, from Oklahoma, resides at Broussac with his wife and daughter, and—I wait to hear of a misfortune in their midst.

"You will come with me? You will help me avert peril from a fellow countryman?"

"Oh, I suppose so," I agreed. One part of France appealed to me as strongly as another, and de Grandin was never a dull companion.

"Ah, good," he exclaimed, offering his hand in token of our compact. "Together, *mon vieux,* we shall prove such a team as the curse of Broussac shall find hard to contend with."

2

The sun was well down toward the horizon when our funny little train puffed officiously into Rouen the following day. The long European twilight had dissolved into darkness, and oblique shadows slanted from the trees in the nascent moonlight as our hired *moteur* entered the château park.

"Good evening, Monsieur Bixby," de Grandin greeted as we followed the servant into the great hallway. "I have taken the liberty to bring a

compatriot of yours, Dr. Trowbridge, with me to aid in my researches." He shot me a meaning glance as he hurried on. "Your kindness in permitting me the facilities of the château library is greatly appreciated, I do assure you."

Bixby, a big, full-fleshed man with ruddy face and drooping mustache, smiled amiably. "Oh, that's all right, Monsoor," he answered. "There must be a couple o' million books stacked up in there, and I can't read a one of 'em. But I've got to pay rent on 'em, just the same, so I'm mighty glad you, or someone who savvies the lingo, can put 'em to use."

"And Madame Bixby, she is well, and the so charming *Mademoiselle*, she, too, is in good health, I trust?"

Our host looked worried. "To tell you the truth, she ain't," he replied. "Mother and I had reckoned a stay in one of these old houses here in France would be just the thing for her, but it seems like she ain't doin' so well as we'd hoped. Maybe we'd better try Switzerland for a spell; they say the mountain air there—"

De Grandin bent forward eagerly. "What is the nature of *Mademoiselle's* indisposition?" he asked. "Dr. Trowbridge is one of your America's most famous physicians, perhaps he—" He paused significantly.

"That so?" Bixby beamed on me. "I'd kind o' figured you was one of them doctors of philosophy we see so many of round here, 'stead of a regular doctor. Now, if you'd be so good as to look at Adrienne, Doc, I'd take it right kindly. Will you come this way? I'll see supper's ready by the time you get through with her."

He led us up a magnificent stairway of ancient carved oak, down a corridor paneled in priceless wainscot, and knocked gently at a high-arched door of age-blackened wood. "Adrienne, darlin'," he called in a huskily tender voice, "here's a doctor to see you—an American doctor, honey. Can you see him?"

"Yes," came the reply from beyond the door, and we entered a bedroom as large as a barrack, furnished with articles of antique design worth their weight in gold to any museum rich enough to buy them.

Fair-haired and violet-eyed, slender to the borderline of emaciation, and with too high a flush on her cheeks, Bixby's daughter lay propped among a heap of real-lace pillows on the great carved bed, the white of her thin throat and arms only a shade warmer than the white of her silk nightdress.

Her father tiptoed from the room with clumsy care and I began my examination, observing her heart and lung action by auscultation and palpation, taking her pulse and estimating her temperature as accurately as possible without my clinical thermometer. Though she appeared suffering from fatigue there was no evidence of functional or organic weakness in any of her organs.

"Hm," I muttered, looking as professionally wise as possible, "just how long have you felt ill, Miss Bixby?"

The girl burst into a storm of tears. "I'm not ill," she denied hotly. "I'm not—oh, why won't you all go away and leave me alone? I don't know what's the matter with me. I—I just want to be let alone!" She buried her face in a pillow and her narrow shoulders shook with sobs.

"Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin whispered, "a tonic—something simple, like a glass of sherry with meals—is indicated, I think. Meantime, let us repair to the so excellent supper which waits below."

We repaired. There was nothing else to do. His advice was sound, I knew, for all the physician's skill is powerless to cheer a young woman who craves the luxury of being miserable.

3

"FIND anything serious, Doc?" Bixby asked as de Grandin and I seated ourselves in the château's paneled dining hall.

"No," I reassured him. "She seems a little run down, but there's certainly nothing wrong which can't be corrected by a light tonic, some judicious exercise and plenty of rest."

"Uh-huh?" he nodded, brightening. "I've been right smart worried over her, lately.

"You know, we wasn't always rich. Up to a couple o' years ago we was poor as church mice—land poor, in the bargain. Then, when they begun findin' oil all round our place, Mother kept at me till I started some drillin,' too, and darned if we didn't bring in a gusher first crack outa the box.

"Adrienne used to teach school when we was ranchin' it—tryin' to, rather—an' she an' a young lawyer, name o' Ray Keefer, had it all fixed up to get married.

"Ray was a good, upstandin' boy, too. Had a considerable practise worked up over Bartleville way, took his own company overseas durin' the war, an' would a' been run for the legislature in a little while, like as not. But when we started takin' royalties on our leases at the rate of about three hundred dollars a week, Mother, she ups and says he warn't no fittin' match for our daughter.

"Then she and Adrienne had it hot an' heavy, with me stayin' outa the fuss an' bein' neutral, as far as possible. Mother was all for breakin' the engagement off short, Adrienne was set on gettin' married right away, an' they finally compromised by agreein' to call a truce for a year while Ray stayed home an' looked after his practise an' Adrienne come over here to Europe with Mother an' me to see the world an' 'have her mind broadened by travel,' as Mother says.

"She's been gettin' a letter from Ray at every stop we made since we left home, an' sendin' back answers just as regular, till we come here. Lately she ain't seemed to care nothin' about Ray, one way or other. Don't answer his letters—half the time don't trouble to open 'em, even, an' goes around the place as if she was sleep-walkin'. Seems kind o' peaked an' run down, like, too. We've been right worried over her. You're sure it ain't consumption, or nothin' like that, Doc?" He looked anxiously at me again.

"Have no fear, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin answered for me. "Dr. Trowbridge and I will give the young lady our greatest care; rest assured, we shall effect a complete cure. We —"

Two shots, following each other in quick succession, sounded from the grounds outside, cutting short his words. We rushed to the entrance, meeting a breathless gamekeeper in the corridor. *"Le serpent, le serpent!"* he exclaimed excitedly, rushing up to Bixby. *"Ohé, Monsieur, un serpent monstrueux, dans le jardin!"*

"What is it you say?" de Grandin demanded. "A serpent in the garden? Where, when; how big?"

The fellow spread his arms to their fullest reach, extending his fingers to increase the space compassed. "A great, a tremendous serpent, *Monsieur,*" he panted. "Greater than the boa constrictor in the Paris menagerie—ten meters long, at the shortest!"

"Pardieu, a snake thirty feet long?" de Grandin breathed incredulously. "Come, *mon enfant,* take us to the spot where you saw this so great zoological wonder."

"Here, 'twas here I saw him, with my own two eyes," the man almost

screamed in his excitement, pointing to a small copse of evergreens growing close beside the château wall. "See, it's here the shots I fired at him cut the bushes"—he pointed to several broken limbs where buckshot from his fowling piece had crashed through the shrubs.

"Here? *Mon Dieu!*" muttered de Grandin.

"Huh!" Bixby produced a plug of tobacco and bit off a generous mouthful. "If you don't lay off that brandy they sell down at the village you'll be seein' pink elephants roostin' in the trees pretty soon. A thirty-foot snake! In this country? Why, we don't grow 'em that big in Oklahoma! Come on, gentlemen, let's get to bed; this feller's snake didn't come out o' no hole in the wall, he came outa a bottle!"

4

Mrs. Bixby, a buxom woman with pale eyes and tinted hair, had small courtesy to waste on us next morning at breakfast. A physician from America who obviously did not enjoy an ultra fashionable practise at home, and an undersized foreigner with a passion for old books, bulked of small importance in her price-marked world. Bixby was taciturn with the embarrassed silence of a wife-ridden man before strangers, and de Grandin and I went into the library immediately following the meal without any attempt at making table talk.

My work consisted, for the most part, of lugging ancient volumes in scuffed bindings from the high shelves and piling them on the table before my colleague. After one or two attempts I gave over the effort to read them, since those not in archaic French were in monkish Latin, both of which were as unintelligible to me as Choctaw.

The little Frenchman, however, dived into the moldering tomes like a gourmet attacking a feast, making voluminous notes, nodding his head furiously as statement after statement in the books seemed to confirm some theory of his, or muttering an occasional approving "*Morbleu!*" or "*Pardieu!*"

"Friend Trowbridge," he looked up from the dusty book spread before him and fixed me with his unwinking stare, "is it not time you saw our fair patient? Go to her, my friend, and whether she approves or whether she objects, apply the stethoscope to her breast, and, while you do so, *examine her torso for bruises.*"

"Bruises?" I echoed.

"Precisely, exactly, quite so!" he shot back. "Bruises, I have said it. They may be of the significance; they may not, but if they are present I desire to know it. I have an hypothesis."

"Oh, very well," I agreed, and went to find my stethoscope.

Though she had not been present at breakfast, I scarcely expected to find Adrienne Bixby in bed, for it was nearly noon when I rapped at her door.

"*S-s-s-sh, Monsieur le Docteur,*" cautioned the maid who answered my summons, "*Mademoiselle* is still asleep. She is exhausted, the poor, pretty one."

"Who is it, Roxanne?" Adrienne demanded in a sleepy, querulous voice. "Tell them to go away."

I inserted my foot in the door and spoke softly to the maid. "*Mademoiselle* is more seriously ill than she realizes; it is necessary that I make an examination."

"Oh, good morning, doctor," the girl said as I brushed past the maid and approached the bed. Her eyes widened with concern as she saw the stethoscope dangling from my hand. "Is—is there anything the matter—

seriously the matter with me?" she asked. "My heart? My lungs?"

"We don't know yet," I evaded. "Very often, you know, symptoms which seem of no importance prove of the greatest importance; then, again, we often find that signs which seem serious at first mean nothing at all. That's it, just lie back, it will be over in a moment."

I placed the instrument against her thin chest, and, as I listened to the accelerated beating of her healthy young heart, glanced quickly down along the line of her ribs beneath the low neckband of her nightrobe.

"Oh, oh, doctor, what is it?" the girl cried in alarm, for I had started back so violently that one of the earphones was shaken from my head. Around the young girl's body, over the ribs, was *an ascending livid spiral,* definitely marked, as though a heavy rope had been wound about her, then drawn taut.

"How did you get that bruise?" I demanded, tucking my stethoscope into my pocket.

A quick flush mantled her neck and cheeks, but her eyes were honest as she answered simply, "I don't know, doctor. It's something I can't explain. When we first came here to Broussac I was as well as could be; we'd only been here about three weeks when I began to feel all used up in the morning. I'd go to bed early and sleep late and spend most of the day lying around, but I never seemed to get enough rest. I began to notice these bruises about that time, too. First they were on my arm, about the wrist or above the elbow—several times all the way up. Lately they've been around my waist and body, sometimes on my shoulders, too, and every morning I feel tireder than the day before. Then—then"—she turned her face from me and tears welled in her eyes—"I don't seem to be interested in th-things the way I used to be. Oh, doctor, I wish I were dead! I'm no earthly good, and—"

"Now, now," I soothed. "I know what you mean when you say you've lost interest in 'things'. There'll be plenty of interest when you get back to Oklahoma again, young lady."

"Oh, doctor, are we going back, really? I asked Mother if we mightn't yesterday and she said Dad had leased this place for a year and we'd have to stay until the lease expired. Do you mean she's changed her mind?"

"M'm, well," I temporized, "perhaps you won't leave Broussac right away; but you remember that old saying about Mohammed and the mountain? Suppose we were to import a little bit of Oklahoma to France, what then?"

"No!" She shook her head vigorously and her eyes filled with tears again. "I don't want Ray to come here. This is an evil place, doctor. It makes people forget all they ever loved and cherished. If he came here he might forget me as—" the sentence dissolved in a fresh flood of tears.

"Well, well," I comforted, "we'll see if we can't get Mother to listen to medical advice."

"Mother never listened to anybody's advice," she sobbed as I closed the door softly and hurried downstairs to tell de Grandin my discovery.

5

"*CORDIEU!*" de Grandin swore excitedly as I concluded my recitation. "A bruise? A bruise about her so white body, and before that on her arms? *Non d'un nom!* My friend, this plot, it acquires the thickness. What do you think?"

"M'm." I searched my memory for long-forgotten articles in the *Medical Times.* "I've read of these stigmata appearing on patients' bod-

ies. They were usually connected with the presence of some wasting disease and an abnormal state of mind, such as extreme religious fervor, or—"

"Ah, bah!" he cut in. "Friend Trowbridge, you can not measure the wind with a yardstick nor weigh a thought on the scales. We deal with something not referable to clinical experiments in this case, or I am much mistaken."

"Why, how do you mean—?" I began, but he turned away with an impatient shrug. "I mean nothing, now," he answered. "The wise judge is he who gives no decision until he has heard all the testimony." Again he commenced reading from the huge volume open before him, making notations on a slip of paper as his eyes traveled rapidly down the lines of faded type.

Mrs. Bixby did not join us at dinner that evening, and, as a consequence, the conversation was much less restrained. Coffee was served in the small corridor connecting the wide entrance hall with the library, and, under the influence of a hearty meal, three kinds of wine and several glasses of *liqueur*, our host expanded like a flower in the sun.

"They tell me Jo-an of Arch was burned to death in Ruin," he commented as he bit the end from a cigar and elevated one knee over the arm of his chair. "Queer way to treat a girl who'd done so much for 'em, seems to me. The guide told us she's been made a saint or somethin' since then, though."

"Yes," I assented idly, "having burned her body and anathematized her soul, the ecclesiastical authorities later decided the poor child's spirit was unjustly condemned. Too bad a little of their sense of justice wasn't felt by the court which tried her in Rouen."

De Grandin looked quizzically at me as he pulled his waxed mustaches alternately, for all the world like a tom-cat combing his whiskers. "Throw not too many stones, my friend," he cautioned. "Nearly five hundred years have passed since the Maid of Orleans was burned as a heretic. Today your American courts convict high school teachers for heresy far less grave than that charged against our Jeanne. We may yet see the bones of your so estimable Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin exhumed from their graves and publicly burned by your heretic-baiters of this today. No, no, my friend, it is not for us of today to sneer at the heretic-burners of yesterday. Torquemada's body lies in the tomb these many years, but his spirit still lives. *Mon Dieu!* What is it that I say? 'His spirit still lives'? *Sacré nom d'une souris!* That may be the answer!" And, as if propelled by a spring, he bounded from his seat and rushed madly down the corridor into the library.

"De Grandin, what's the matter?" I asked as I followed him into the book-lined room.

"*Non, non,* go away, take a walk, go to the devil!" he shot back, staring wildly around the room, his eager eyes searching feverishly for a particular volume. "You vex me, you annoy me, you harass me; I would be alone at this time. Get out!"

Puzzled and angered by his bruskness, I turned to leave, but he called over his shoulder as I reached the door: "Friend Trowbridge, please interview Monsieur Bixby's chef and obtain from him a sack of flour. Bring it here to me in not less than an hour, please."

6

"FORGIVE my rudeness, Friend Trowbridge," he apologized when I re-entered the library an hour or so later, a parcel of flour from

Bixby's pantry under my arm. "I had a thought which required all my concentration at the time, and any disturbing influence—even your own always welcome presence—would have distracted my attention. I am sorry and ashamed I spoke so."

"Oh, never mind that," I replied. "Did you find what you were looking for?"

He nodded emphatically. "*Mais oui,*" he assured me. "All which I sought—and more. Now let us to work. First I would have you go with me into the garden where that gamekeeper saw the serpent last night."

"But he couldn't have seen such a snake," I protested as we left the library. "We all agreed the fellow was drunk."

"Surely, exactly; of course," he conceded, nodding vigorously. "Undoubtedly the man had drunk brandy. Do you recall, by any chance, the wise old Latin proverb, '*In vino veritas*'?"

"'In wine is truth'?" I translated tentatively. "How could the fact that the man was drunk when he imagined he saw a thirty-foot snake in a French garden make the snake exist when we know perfectly well such a thing could not be?"

"*Oh la, la,*" he chuckled. "What a sober-sided one you are, *cher ami.* It was here the fellow declared *Monsieur le Serpent* emerged, was it not? See, here are the shot-marks on the shrubs."

He bent, parting the bushes carefully, and crawled toward the château's stone foundation. "Observe," he commanded in a whisper, "between these stones the cement has weathered away, the opening is great enough to permit passage of a sixty-foot serpent, did one desire to come this way. No?"

"True enough," I agreed, "but the driveway out there would give room for the great Atlantic sea serpent himself to crawl about. You don't contend he's making use of it, though, do you?"

He tapped his teeth thoughtfully with his forefinger, paying no attention to my sarcasm. "Let us go within," he suggested, brushing the leafmold carefully from his knees as he rose.

We re-entered the house and he led the way through one winding passage after another, unlocking a succession of nail-studded doors with the bunch of jangling iron keys he obtained from Bixby's butler.

"And here is the chapel," he announced when half an hour's steady walk brought us to a final age-stained door. "It was here they found that so unfortunate Monsieur Alvarez. A gloomy place in which to die, truly."

It was, indeed. The little sanctuary lay dungeon-deep, without windows or, apparently, any means of external ventilation. Its vaulted roof was composed of a series of equilateral arches whose stringers rose a scant six feet above the floor and rested on great blocks of flint carved in hideous designs of dragons' and griffins' heads. The low altar stood against the farther wall, its silver crucifix blackened with age and all but eaten away with corrosion. Row on row, about the low upright walls, were lined the crypts containing the coffins of long dead de Broussacs, each closed with a marble slab engraved with the name and title of its occupant. A pall of cobwebs, almost as heavy as woven fabrics, festooned from vaulted ceiling to floor, intensifying the air of ghostly gloom which hung about the chamber like the acrid odor of ancient incense.

My companion set the flickering candle-lantern upon the floor beside the doorway and broke open the package of flour. "See, Friend Trow-

bridge, do as I do," he directed, dipping his hand into the flour and sprinkling the white powder lightly over the flagstone pavement of the chapel. "Back away toward the door," he commanded, "and on no account leave a footprint in the meal. We must have a fair, unsoiled page for our records."

Wonderingly, but willingly, I helped him spread a film of flour over the chapel floor from altar-step to doorway, then turned upon him with a question: "What do you expect to find in this meal, de Grandin? Surely not footprints. No one who did not have to would come to this ghastly place."

He nodded seriously at me as he picked up his lantern and the remains of the package of flour. "Partly right and partly wrong you are, my friend. One may come who must, one may come who wants. Tomorrow, perhaps, we shall know more than we do today."

7

I was in the midst of my toilet when he burst into my bedroom next morning, feline mustache bristling, his round eyes fairly snapping with excitement. "Come, *mon vieux,*" he urged, tugging at my arm as a nervous terrier might have urged his master to go for a romp, "come and see; right away, quick, at once, immediately!"

We hastened through the château's modern wing, passed the doors blocking the corridors of the Fifteenth Century buildings and came at last to the Eleventh Century chapel. De Grandin paused before the oak-and-iron door like a showman about to raise the curtain from an exhibit as he lit the candle in his lantern, and I heard his small, even teeth clicking together in a chill of suppressed excitement. "Behold, *mon ami,*" he commanded in a hoarse whisper more expressive of emotion than a shout, "behold what writings are on the page which we did prepare!"

I looked through the arched doorway, then turned to him, dumb with surprize.

Leading from the chapel entrance, and ending at the center of the floor, directly before the altar, was the unmistakable trail of little, naked feet. No woodcraft was needed to trace the walker's course. She had entered the sanctuary, marched straight and unswervingly to a spot about fifteen feet from the altar, but directly before it, then turned about slowly in a tiny circle, no more than two feet in diameter, for at that point the footprints were so superimposed on each other that all individual traces were lost.

But the other track which showed in the strewn flour was less easily explained. Beginning at a point directly opposite the place the footprints ceased, this other trail ran some three or four inches wide in a lazy zigzag, as though a single automobile wheel had been rolled in an uncertain course across the floor by someone staggeringly drunk. But no prints of feet followed the wheel-track. The thing had apparently traversed the floor of its own volition.

"See," de Grandin whispered, "flour-prints lead away from the door"—he pointed to a series of white prints, plainly describing bare heels and toes, leading up the passage from the chapel door, diminishing in clearness with each step until they faded out some ten paces toward the modern part of the château. "And see," he repeated, drawing me inside the chapel to the wall where the other, inexplicable, track began, "a trail leads outward here, too."

Following his pointing finger with my eye I saw what I had not noticed before, a cleft in the chapel wall some five inches wide, evidently the result of crumbling cement and gradually

sinking foundation stones. At the entrance of the fissure a tiny pile of flour showed, as though some object previously dusted with the powder had been forced through the crevice.

I blinked stupidly at him. "Wh-what is this track?" I asked in bewilderment.

"Ah, bah!" he exclaimed disgustedly. "The blindest man is he who shuts his own eyes, my friend. Did you never, as a boy, come upon the trail of a serpent in the dusty road?"

"A snake track"—my mind refused the evidence of my eyes—"but how can that be—here?"

"The gamekeeper *thought* he saw a serpent in the garden *exactly outside this chapel,*" de Grandin replied in a low voice, "and it was where that besotted gamekeeper *imagined* he beheld a serpent that the body of Mijnheer Van Brundt was found crushed out of semblance to a human man. Tell me, Friend Trowbridge,—you know something of zoology—what creature, besides the constrictor-snake, kills his prey by crushing each bone of his body till nothing but shapeless pulp remains? *Hein?*"

"Bu—but—" I began, when he cut me short:

"Go call on our patient," he commanded. "If she sleeps, do not awaken her, but *observe the drugget on her floor!*"

I hastened to Adrienne Bixby's room, pushed unceremoniously past Roxanne, the maid, and tiptoed to the girl's bedside. She lay on her side, one cheek pillowed on her arm, sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion. I bent over her a moment, listening to her even breathing, then, nodding to the maid, turned and walked softly from the room, my eyes glued to the dark-red plush carpet which covered the chamber floor.

Five minutes later I met the little Frenchman in the library, my excitement now as high as his own. "De Grandin," I whispered, involuntarily lowering my voice, "I looked at her carpet. The thing's made of red velvet and shows a spot of dust ten feet away. A trail of faint white footprints leads right up to her bed!"

8

"*SACRÉ nom d'un petit bonhomme!*" He reached for his green felt hat and turned toward the door. "The trail becomes clear; even my good, skeptical friend Trowbridge can follow it, I think. Come *cher ami,* let us see what we can see."

He led me through the château park, between the rows of tall, trembling poplar trees, to a spot where black-boughed evergreens cast perpetual shade above a stone-fenced area of a scant half acre. Rose bushes, long deteriorated from their cultivated state, ran riot over the ground, the whole enclosure had the gloomy aspect of a deserted cemetery. "Why," I asked, "what place is this, de Grandin? It's as different from the rest of the park as—"

"As death is from life, *n'est-ce-pas?*" he interjected. "Yes, so it is, truly. Observe." He parted a mass of intertwined brambles and pointed to a slab of stone, once white, but now brown and roughened with centuries of exposure. "Can you read the inscription?" he asked.

The letters, once deeply cut in the stone, were almost obliterated, but I made out:

CI GIT TOUJOURS RAIMOND
SEIGNEUR DE BROUSSAC

"What does it say?" he demanded.

"'Here lies Raimond, Lord of Broussac,'" I replied, translating as well as I could.

"*Non, non,*" he contradicted. "It does not say, '*Ci gît,*' here lies; but '*Ci gît toujours,*'—here lies always,

or forever. Eh, my friend, what do you make of that if anything?"

"Dead men usually lie permanently," I countered.

"Ah, so? Have I not heard your countrymen sing:

"'John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the grave,
But his soul goes marching on'?

"What of the poor Seigneur de Broussac, is he to lie buried here *toujours*, or shall he, too, not rise once again?"

"I'm not familiar with French idioms," I defended. "Perhaps the stonecutter merely intended to say the Seigneur de Broussac lies here for his last long sleep."

"*Cher* Trowbridge," de Grandin replied, speaking with slow impressiveness, "when a man's monument is carved the words are not chosen without due consideration. Who chose Raimond de Broussac's epitaph thought long upon its wording, and when he dictated those words his wish was father to his thought."

He stared thoughtfully at the crumbling stone a moment, repeating softly to himself, "And *Madame l'abbesse* said, 'Snake thou art, and—' " he shook his shoulders in an impatient shrug as though to throw off some oppressive train of thought. "*Eh bien*, but we waste time here, my friend; let us make an experiment." Turning on his heel he led the way to the stables.

"I would have some boards, a hammer and some sharp nails, if you please," he informed the hostler who greeted us at the barn door. "My friend, the very learned *Docteur* Trowbridge, from America, and I desire to test an idea."

When the servant brought the desired materials de Grandin sawed the boards into two lengths, one about eighteen inches, the other about three feet, and through these he drove the sharp-pointed horseshoe nails at intervals of about three-quarters of an inch, so that, when he finished, he had what resembled two large combs of which the boards were the backs and the needle-pointed nails the teeth. "Now," he announced, surveying his work critically, "I think we are prepared to give a little surprize party."

Taking up the hammer and two short pieces of boards in addition to his "combs" he led the way to the spot outside the château walls where the tipsy gamekeeper claimed to have seen the great snake. Here he attached the two strips of wood at right angles to the shorter of the pieces of board through which he had driven the nails, then, using the lateral lengths of wood as staked, attached the comblike contrivance he had made firmly to the earth, its back resting levelly on the ground, its sharp spikes pointing upward before the crevice in the château foundations. Any animal larger than an earthworm desiring to make use of the crack in the wall as a passageway would have to jump or crawl over the sharp, lancelike points of the nails. "*Bien*," he commented, viewing his work with approval, "now to put your wise American maxim of 'Safety First' into practise."

We found our way to the ancient, gloomy chapel, and he wedged the longer of the nail-filled boards firmly between the jambs at the inner side of the doorway. "And now," he announced, as we turned once more toward the inhabited part of the house, "I have the splendid appetite for dinner, and for sleep, too, when bedtime arrives."

"What on earth does all this child's play mean, de Grandin?" I demanded, my curiosity getting the better of me.

He winked roguishly by way of answer, whistled a snatch of tune, then remarked, irrelevantly, "If you

have the desire to gamble, *cher ami,* I will lay you a wager of five francs that our fair patient will be improved tomorrow morning."

9

He won the bet. For the first time since we had been at Broussac, Adrienne Bixby was at the breakfast table the following day, and the healthy color in her cheeks and the clear sparkle of her lovely eyes told of a long, restful sleep.

Two more days passed, each seeing a marked improvement in her spirits and appearance. The purple semicircles beneath her eyes faded to a wholesome pink, her laughter rippled like the sound of a purling brook among the shadows of the château's gloomy halls.

"I gotta hand it to you, Doc," Bixby complimented me. "You've shore brought my little girl round in great shape. Name your figger an' I'll pay the bill, an' never paid one with a better heart, neither."

"Dr. Trowbridge," Adrienne accosted me one morning as I was about to join de Grandin in the library, "remember what you said about importing a little bit of Oklahoma to France the other day? Well, I've just received a letter—the dearest letter—from Ray. He's coming over—he'll be here day after tomorrow, I think, and no matter what Mother says or does, we're going to be married, right away. I've been Mrs. Bixby's daughter long enough; now I'm going to be Mr. Keefer's wife. If Mother makes Dad refuse to give us any money, it won't make the least little bit of difference. I taught school before Father got his money, and I know how to live as a poor man's wife. I'm going to have my man—my own man—and no one —*no one at all*—shall keep him away from me one day longer!"

"Good for you!" I applauded her rebellion. Without knowing young Keefer I was sure he must be a very desirable sort of person to have incurred the enmity of such a character as Bixby's wife.

But next morning Adrienne was not at breakfast, and the downcast expression of her father's face told his disappointment more eloquently than any words he could have summoned. "Reckon the girl's had a little set-back, Doc," he muttered, averting his eyes. His wife looked me fairly between the brows, and though she said never a word I felt she considered me a pretty poor specimen of medical practitioner.

"*Mais non, Monsieur le Docteur,*" Roxanne demurred when I knocked at Adrienne's door, "you shall not waken her. The poor lamb is sleeping, she is exhaust this morning, and she shall have her sleep. I, Roxanne, say so."

Nevertheless, I shook Adrienne gently, rousing her from a sleep which seemed more stupor than slumber. "Come, come, my dear," I scolded, "this won't do, you know. You've got to brace up. You don't want Ray to find you in this condition, do you? Remember, he's due at Broussac tomorrow."

"Is he?" she answered indifferently. "I don't care. Oh, doctor, I'm —so—tired." She was asleep again, almost at the last word.

I turned back the covers and lifted the collar of her robe. About her body, purple as the marks of a whiplash, lay the wide, circular bruise, fresher and more extensive than it had been the day I first noticed it.

"Death of my life!" de Grandin swore when I found him in the library and told him what I had seen. "That *sacré* bruise again? Oh, it is too much! Come and see what else I have found this cursed day!" Seizing my hand he half led, half

dragged me outdoors, halting at the clump of evergreens where he had fixed his nail-studded board beside the château wall.

Ripped from its place and lying some ten feet away was the board, its nails turned upward in the morning sunlight and reminding me, somehow, of the malicious grin from a fleshless skull.

"Why, how did this happen?" I asked.

He pointed mutely to the moist earth in which the dwarf cedars grew, his hand shaking with excitement and rage. In the soft loam beside the place where the board had been fixed were the prints of two tiny, bare feet.

"What's it mean?" I demanded, exasperated at the way he withheld information from me, but his answer was no more enlightening than any of his former cryptic utterances.

"The battle is joined, my friend," he replied through set teeth. "Amuse yourself as you will—or can—this day. I go to Rouen right away, immediately, at once. There are weapons I must have for this fight besides those we now have. Eh, but it will be a fight to the death! Yes, *par la croix,* and we shall help Death reclaim his own too. *Pardieu!* Am I not Jules de Grandin? Am I to be made a monkey of by one who preys on women? *Morbleu,* we shall see!"

And with that he left me, striding toward the stables in search of a motor car, his little yellow mustache bristling with fury, his blue eyes snapping, French oaths pouring from him like spray from a garden-sprinkler.

10

It was dark before he returned, his green hat set at a rakish angle over his right ear, a long, closely wrapped brown paper parcel under his arm. *"Eh bien,"* he confided to me with an elfish grin, "it required much argument to secure this. That old priest, he is a stubborn one, and unbelieving, almost as skeptical as you, Friend Trowbridge."

"What on earth is it?" I demanded, looking curiously at the package. Except that it was too long, it might have been an umbrella, judging by its shape.

He winked mysteriously as he led the way to his room, where, having glanced about furtively, as though he apprehended some secret watcher, he laid the bundle on the bed and began cutting the strings securing its brown paper swaddling clothes with his pocket knife. Laying back the final layer of paper he uncovered a long sword, such a weapon as I had never beheld outside a museum. The blade was about three and a half feet in length, tapering from almost four inches in width at the base to an inch and a half at the tip, where it terminated in a beveled point. Unlike modern weapons, this one was furnished with two sharpened edges, almost keen enough to do duty for a knife, and, instead of the usual groove found on the sides of sword blades, its center presented a distinct ridge where the steep bevels met at an obtuse angle as they sloped from the edges. The handle, made of ivory or some smoothly polished bone, was long enough to permit a two-handed grip, and the hilt which crossed the blade at a right angle turned downward toward the point, its ends terminating in rather clumsily carved cherubs' heads. Along the blade, apparently carved, rather than etched, marched a procession of miscellaneous angels, demons and men at arms with a mythological monster, such as a griffin or dragon, thrown in for occasional good measure. Between these crudely carved figures I made out the letters of the motto: *Dei Gratia*—by the grace of God.

"Well?" I asked wonderingly as I viewed the ancient weapon.

"Well?" he repeated mockingly, then: "Had you as many blessings on your head as this old bit of carved metal has received, you would be a very holy man, indeed, Friend Trowbridge. This sword, it was once strapped to the thigh of a saint—it matters not which one—who fought the battles of France when France needed all the champions, saintly or otherwise, she could summon. For centuries it has reposed in a very ancient church at Rouen, not, indeed, as a relic, but as a souvenir scarcely less venerated. When I told the *curé* I purposed borrowing it for a day or more I thought he would die of the apoplexy forthwith, but"—he gave his diminutive mustache a complacent tweak—"such was my power of persuasion that you see before you the very sword."

"But what under heaven will you do with the thing, now you've got it?" I demanded.

"Much—perhaps," he responded, picking up the weapon, which must have weighed at least twenty pounds, and balancing it in both hands as a wood-chopper holds his ax before attacking a log.

"*Nom d'un bouc!*" he glanced suddenly at his wrist-watch and replaced the sword on his bed. "I do forget myself. Run, my friend, fly, fly like the swallow to Mademoiselle Adrienne's room and caution her to remain within—at all hazards. Bid her close her windows, too, for we know not what may be abroad or what can climb a wall this night. See that stubborn, pig-foolish maid of hers has instructions to lock her mistress' door on the inside and, should *Mademoiselle* rise in the night and desire to leave, on no account permit her to pass. You understand?"

"No, I'll be hanged if I do," I replied. "What—?"

"*Non, non!*" he almost shrieked. "Waste not time nor words, my friend. I desire that you should do as I say. Hurry, I implore; it is of the importance, I do assure you."

I did as he requested, having less difficulty than I had expected concerning the windows, since Adrienne was already sunk in a heavy sleep and Roxanne possessed the French peasant's inborn hatred of fresh air.

"Good, very, very good," de Grandin commended when I rejoined him. "Now we shall wait until the second quarter of the night—then, ah, perhaps I show you something to think about in the after years, Friend Trowbridge."

He paced the floor like a caged animal for a quarter-hour, smoking one cigarette after another, then: "Let us go," he ordered curtly, picking up the giant sword and shouldering it as a soldier does his rifle. "*Aller au feu!*"

We tramped down the corridor toward the stairway, when he turned quickly, almost transfixing me with the sword blade, which projected two feet and more beyond his shoulder. "One more inspection, Friend Trowbridge," he urged. "Let us see how it goes with Mademoiselle Adrienne. *Eh bien*, do we not carry her colors into battle this night?"

"Never mind that monkey-business!" we heard a throaty feminine voice command as we approached Adrienne's room. "I've stood about all I intend to from you; tomorrow you pack your clothes, if you've any to pack, and get out of this house."

"Eh, what is this?" de Grandin demanded as we reached the chamber door and beheld Roxanne weeping bitterly, while Mrs. Bixby towered over her like a Cochin hen bullying a half-starved sparrow.

"I'll tell you what it is!" replied the irate mistress of the house. "I

came to say good-night to my daughter a few minutes ago and this—this hussy!—refused to open the door for me. I soon settled her, I can tell you. I told her to open that door and get out. When I went into the room I found every window locked tight—in this weather, too.

"Now I catch her hanging around the door after I'd ordered her to her room. Insubordination; rank insubordination, it is. She leaves this house bright and early tomorrow morning, I can tell you!"

"Oh, Monsieur Trow-breege, Monsieur de Grandin," sobbed the trembling girl, "I did but attempt to obey your orders, and—and she drove me from my duty. Oh, I am so sorree!"

De Grandin's small teeth shut with a snap like a miniature steel trap. "And you forced this girl to unbar the door?" he asked, almost incredulously, gazing sternly at Mrs. Bixby.

"I certainly did," she bridled, "and I'd like to know what business it is of yours. If—"

He brushed by her, leaping into the bedroom with a bound which carried him nearly two yards beyond the doorsill.

We looked past him toward the bed. It was empty. Adrienne Bixby was gone.

"Why—why, where can she *be*?" Mrs. Bixby asked, her domineering manner temporarily stripped from her by surprize.

"I'll tell you where she is!" de Grandin, white to the lips, shouted at her. "She is where you have sent her, you meddling old ignoramus, you, you—oh, *mon Dieu*, if you were a man how I should enjoy cutting your heart out!"

"Say, see here——" she began, her bewilderment sunk in anger, but he cut her short with a roar.

"Silence, you! To your room, foolish, criminally foolish one, and pray *le bon Dieu* on your bare knees that the pig-ignorance of her mother shall not have cost your daughter her life this night! Come, Trowbridge, my friend, come away; the breath of this woman is a contamination, and we must hurry if we are to undo her fool's work. Pray God we are not too late!"

We rushed downstairs, traversed the corridors leading to the older wing of the house, wound our way down and down beneath the level of the ancient moat till we stood before the entrance of the chapel.

"Ah," de Grandin breathed softly, lowering his sword point a moment as he dashed the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand, "no sound, Friend Trowbridge. Whatever happens, whatever you may see, do not cry out; 'tis death to one we seek to save if you waken her!"

Raising his hand, he signed himself quickly with the cross, muttering an indistinct *in nomine*, while I gaped in amazement to see the cynical, scoffing little man of science shedding his agnosticism and reverting to a simple act of his childhood's faith.

Lifting the sword in both hands, he gave the chapel door a push with his foot, whispering to me, "Hold high the lantern, Friend Trowbridge, we need light for our work."

The rays from my lamp streamed across the dark, vaulted chapel and I nearly let the lantern crash to the floor at what I beheld.

Standing before the ancient, tumbledown altar, her nude, white body gleaming in the semi-dark like a lovely, slender statue of sun-stained marble, was Adrienne Bixby. Her long, rippling hair, which had always re-

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When The Graves Were Opened

by Arthur J. Burks

FOOL! Idiot! Imbecile!

I get a certain satisfaction in writing the above words characterizing myself. How feeble they are to express my own opinion of myself! But I hope that someone else, reading them, will pull up smartly and turn over a new leaf. For there are in this world many others who look at things as did I; who thoughtlessly condemn themselves out of their own mouths, never stopping to think of tomorrow and the countless tomorrows after that which stretch away into all eternity.

Be satisfied, I beseech you, to walk in the faith of your fathers! For those whose logical theories you heed and follow are powerless to help you beyond the curtain! They are nothing but empty words, written by people who tear down when they have infinite capacities for building.

Read and take heed!

But back to the beginning. I forgot for the moment that, over there where you are, there is still such a non-understandable thing as Time. I am writing back from eternity to those who, living still, may be induced to ponder for a moment to recall that life, which takes less than a fleeting instant out of Time, is very sweet.

Know then that I was an atheist, a blasphemer, an iconoclast, a destroyer of images! I mocked at the gods of my fathers, pointing out to all who would listen that those gods had feet of clay. I laughed in huge enjoyment at what I conceived to be the crude records of Moses and the Apostles, calling them the teachings of false prophets who would wilfully mislead countless generations of human beings.

I had delved into the deeper sciences and that delving had killed the faith I had taken out into the world with me from my mother's knee. Not so, however, with my dearest friend Harvey Hesford. And he had delved deeper into science than I ever had, but holding fast to his faith meanwhile. To him science was but the instrument by which he hoped to prove, once and for all, that there is a God and that God is good. And he

had enough of this world's goods to make it unnecessary for him to labor for hire. What he learned he told to no one. Except myself.

He called me on the telephone to tell me that he had just perfected the latest invention upon which he had been working and he wished me to run over to his workshop to see it.

I ran over to Harvey's workshop.

The memory of those tense moments there will go with me to the end of Time. Time! Ha! Ha! There is no Time! Just limitless Nothingness, peopled by——

But wait!

HARVEY met me at the door, and his face was white and strained. I smiled at him and looked over his shoulders into the shop. He was always getting excited over his inventions—and well he might, since, had he ever made them public, the whole world would have become excited to keep him company. His inventions were like that. But as I say, I looked over his shoulders into the workshop, which I hadn't entered for several months, owing to the heavy pressure of my own affairs. We had been in daily touch, however, for we took luncheon together with a faithfulness that had made the daily affairs somewhat of a ritual. And always our meals were punctuated with never-ending argument. I was an iconoclast, remember, and Harvey believed as his mother had taught him to believe. I can't seem to keep to my story! What I started to say was that, beyond Harvey Hesford, I saw a huge bit of machinery that, at first glimpse, seemed terribly unwieldy. It captured my interest at once and I pushed Hesford aside, moving past him to examine this child of his brain at closer range. And what a machine! Unwieldy in the mass, yet compounded of wires, filaments and threads that would have conceivably vanished at a fairy's breath. I can't describe it, but I can tell you what it did.

"Name it and take it!" I said facetiously. "What is it, Harvey?"

Harvey frowned slightly, as though I had said something exceedingly irreverent. But he walked over to stand beside me, nevertheless, and began to explain the workings of this mechanical giant.

"Gibbons," he said in awed tones, "I have perfected a machine which will answer, once and for all, the greatest question which man has ever asked! Since the beginning of civilization man has asked, 'Why?' This machine annihilates what we know as time! It turns back the hands until the one who investigates can, through this machine, drop back, a living entity, into any period of man's remote past that he may desire! By sitting in this seat, with this apparatus attached to your body in various places, you have but to make a wish—a wish to travel backward through the ages, and your wish is granted with the speed of light itself!"

I looked at Harvey for a stupefied moment. Then I threw back my head and laughed! Harvey regarded me with grave concern. To him it was assuredly no laughing matter. He knew!

"Fine!" I said quickly. "I'll be the first one to try out your supernatural contraption! Here, I take my seat! Strap on the wires! So! You know, Harvey, there is one thing I have always wanted settled. With this machine, if the thing works, I can have the question answered. I wish, then, to be taken back through the centuries, to stand on Golgotha during the Crucifixion! For the Apostles have said, Harvey, that, upon the death of the Carpenter, the 'heavens were rent in twain'; that 'the graves gave up their dead'; that 'the dead arose and went immediately into the city.' But, Harvey,

old chap, here the story stops! What I want to know is: what became of the dead after they went into the city? Did they take up the threads of life where they had dropped them on their deathbeds? Did they become in all matters the same as they had been during their previous lives? I have often wondered, and now you can help me to settle a moot question—a question which neither the Apostles nor secular history deign to answer!"

Harvey's hand, upraised to touch a white-nubbed button behind my head, paused in the act and began to tremble violently. I saw his white face go whiter still and the fine dew break forth upon his forehead. When he bent to look into my eyes and to speak to me, his voice trembled, too.

"Jess," he said, in a voice so low I could scarcely hear it, "my dearest friend, Jess! For years I have listened to your blasphemies—for years I have looked at you in wonder while you propounded your terrible and searching propositions—and always I have watched you spellbound, expecting that the wrath of the Lord would descend upon your head from the heavens, and wipe you off the face of the earth! Why it has not done so, He only knows! Jess, this machine, upon which I have gone a hundred times farther than did Edison on his 'spirit' machine, will do just as I have claimed for it. If you wish to go back to Golgotha you will do just that—when I press this little button. Think, Jess! If you believed that it would work would you still wish to go back?"

"Sure!" I retorted. "Always providing that you could bring me back to the present when the experiment was finished!"

"I can do that," replied Harvey softly.

"But I don't believe in this piffle, Harvey! I think your everlasting researches have unhinged your brain. I'm going to act as the experiment and show you how useless it all is. Press the button!"

Harvey's hand, which had dropped to his side as he spoke, raised once more and hovered over the fateful button.

"Wait!" I cried, grinning as I thought to add a final ironic touch to the farce; "if you can send my astral body back through time, why can't I send messages back to my corporeal housing here and make my mundane hands record what I see? Place pencil and paper before me and, if this monster works, maybe I'll have a lot to write about!"

You see I had faith in my own strange beliefs, too. Frankly, I felt assured that nothing whatever would happen when he pressed the button. And when Harvey moved away to bring paper and pencil, which he placed on top of a table across my legs, I was sure of it. I almost laughed anew at his portentous gravity. His hand went once more to the button.

"Are you ready, Jess?" he asked. "And God have mercy on your soul!"

"You sound like an executioner turning on the juice!" I cried.

And in that instant he pressed the button!

How can I describe that next instant! A great shock, as of many volts of electricity, surged through me. Still with that thought of the executioner turning on the "juice" in my mind, the actual happening was startling, to say the least. Pinpoints of light danced before my eyes, and Harvey's workshop vanished from view as though the wand of a magician had passed over it.

I seemed to be floating, gently as a bit of down in a light breeze, through limitless space. I say "gently" because that was my im-

pression although, weirdly enough, I seemed to be traveling with terrific speed. I tried to look about me, sought for view of my hands, feet and body, but could see nothing. I was nothing but mentality! I called it "mentality" even then. But I tell you now that I was the *me* of my corporeal body; that I was a soul that had been released! Perhaps Hesford himself can not explain to you just why this is so; but I, being a free spirit now, can do so. This, then, was what his machine did to me: It merely separated my soul from my body (call it death if you will), while at the same time, this machine, where Edison's failed, is sensitive to messages from the spirit world, allowing me to send back this story. It has no power to project a spirit into the past as Hesford claimed for it—of itself! But I, now, can project myself into the past as you understand the past! For over here there is no such thing as past, present, or future! I am a spark from the Divine Flame, which is All-Powerful, Omniscient. The past lies before me as an open book, from which I may read as I will. And because I left the earth with a blasphemy on my lips, I have elected to go back to Golgotha in very truth, as I but said in jest to Harvey, to satisfy myself for all time of the facts in the case.

Out of the limitless spaces through which I had been hurled with such speed as no man may conceive I began slowly to descend toward the earth which, dim and hazy, came up out of the void toward me. Just a huge ball it was, at first, ringed with patches of white vapor in which the sun drew pictures the color of blood. I had a sensation of coolness as I passed through the clouds above the earth—memories of my corporeal state perhaps—to see the earth itself below me.

I landed lightly in a narrow street in a strange city—a city that rang with the crazed shouts of a multitude of men, women, and children—people dressed in clothing that might have been taken bodily from illustrations in the Books of the Apostles! They were moving, a vast concourse, toward the center of the city.

Need I mention that city's name?

I CAME down to them out of the clouds, but the people among whom I dropped paid me no heed—which was natural in that they could not see me. I followed them as they hurried, studying the faces on all sides. They were shouting, as I have said, and, though they spoke a language which I had never heard before, I understood every word—and the most common, the most oft-repeated, were these:

"Away with him! Crucify him!"

My heart grew cold within me. I have no heart, you understand, but I experienced a sensation which would have called for that remark up there in the dim and distant future with you who read this. In that instant I knew what was to come. My feet (pardon me) were heavy as though shod with lead.

Then I stood beneath a canopy upon a raised platform at one side of a great square. Before me were many important-looking officials who wore the beautiful togas of the Roman pontiffs. And these, as they walked about, glanced nervously at the screaming crowd in the square outside, and their brows were lined with worry—lines in which the fine dew had collected, the dew of mental torture. Then they would look away from the crowd toward another and more important-looking man who sat upon a dais above the platform. It was plain that, worried with fear though they were, they were still glad that the great decision for which the crowd was clamoring was up to the man on the dais. Indecision was in that man's face, writ large where

his subordinates, and also those in the broad square, might see and read. The man thrust one foot forward as though he would rise up from his seat. The crowd in the courtyard shrieked anew, clamoring for a word from the Roman governor.

Pontius Pilate was being called upon to decide!

He left his dais and approached the edge of the platform, leaning heavily upon the railing at the platform's edge. His eyes searched the crowd before him.

Take care! Pontius Pilate, take care! Upon your decision rests the life-blood of generations yet unborn!

Then spoke Pontius Pilate, waving a trembling hand toward the screaming crowd:

"What would ye that we do to this man who calls himself King of the Jews?"

As one voice came the many-throated cry of the blood-mad crowd:

"Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Pilate waved his hand in resignation, turned about and beckoned to one of his officers. This one departed, to return shortly with a basin of water. Pontius Pilate, turning his back upon the scene in the courtyard, began to lave his hands!

Oh, for a corporeal body, that I might make myself known to Pontius Pilate! That I might warn him of this terrible thing which he did! Think you, Pontius, that all the washing of hands which you may do throughout eternity, can wash that one ghastly stain from your guilty hands? Turn again, Pilate, turn again! I rushed to him and tugged frantically at his toga. He paid me no attention; for I was but an entity who must wait nineteen hundred years to be born! He could not know that I was there—that I represented the people yet to come who would be affected by this great decision which the Roman governor had made. It was useless, hopeless, impossible! Sadly I turned back to view the scene in the courtyard.

Would that I possessed the brush of a Leonardo da Vinci to reproduce that scene! That I were gifted with the genius of Milton in telling what I saw!

For in that courtyard I saw Him Whom all my life I have doubted! Weary unto death, with the great wooden beam across his back, that beam with its significant cross-bar. He winced with pain as the leather-thonged whips of His murderers scored His beloved flesh. Many there were who laughed at Him and reviled Him, cursing Him with unspeakable epithets.

God the Father! Could they not see, as could I, that nebulous, golden circle of heavenly radiance which rested, a Father's benediction, upon that pain-furrowed brow?

Surely not, else they would have known that He needed no other crown to proclaim His Kingship! But they could not see, and when one of the soldiers fashioned, amid the laughter of his fellows, a ghastly crown of piercing thorns, they cheered with a many-throated voice that must have gone back to Pontius Pilate, causing him to pause again in doubt as he methodically laved his hands.

The soldier moved forward while I, powerless to prevent, although my whole soul cried out against this horror, could but follow his movements with eyes that were heavy with sorrow and dread. When the fellow placed the ghastly crown upon that kingly head, and the drops of blood which He gave for the redemption of mankind came down in crimson jets to dot His face, I winced as though my head had received that crown.

For the first time since I had forsworn my mother's teachings I prayed! Was it imagination, or did that noble brow, taut with the pain

of the world's sins, grow smooth for a single instant?

I, of all that vast concourse, save One, could look into the future and see what this great scene signified. In my mind's eye I saw the hordes from the European continent which marched in the Crusades to regain the Holy Sepulcher! I saw their blood grow red against a thousand sunsets. I saw, and felt, each and every one of the pain-creating contrivances that made of the Spanish Inquisition a period of such horror that the world will never forget. I saw the terrible Duke of Alva lay waste the Netherlands. And I knew that the fault of all this horror lay with one man who, back beside his dais, representing his kingly authority, among his subservient inferiors, laved his hands to wash away a stain that nothing could ever erase this side of the end of Time. Do you think, Pontius Pilate, thus lightly to alter the very souls of the countless multitudes yet to be born into the world?

Out of the limitless spaces where dwell the yet-unborn I wonder what vast multitudes of entities did not look down upon this outrage, seeing then what it all meant to them when, hundreds and thousands of years hence, they would make up the populations of London, New York, Berlin and all the other cities of the earth, knowing as they looked that, when they came into the world, they would recall none of it.

Of this I thought as, following the multitude—slowly, as though I were burdened with a bit of the heavy Cross which bent the back of the Nazarene—we went out of the city and came to the Rock that was like a skull. I know that those unborn multitudes watched it too, for I was one of them and could see them all about me, stretching away in countless hordes toward the outer limits of space. And we, all of us together, were powerless to aid Him Who was giving his life that we might live!

2

Of that long, slow pilgrimage to the place of the Crucifixion there are writers who have, witnesses at the time, spoken the last word. My words will die as time passes, theirs will live as long as humanity lives. For their words are a part of the Book. But perhaps it seemed different to them than to me, I can not say as to that; for when three men see a certain thing come to pass, and go away to tell about it, the result will be three different versions, no two of them alike. Perhaps mine is different from all the others. So be it. I try but to repeat what I saw.

I will begin where the three crosses first stood upright upon Golgotha. In the center the Divine Nazarene, with a thief on his right and a thief on his left. Of the three, only He wore a crown, a ghastly crown of thorns. Imagine it if you can! A naked body, composed of living, quivering flesh—housing a soul—and hanging suspended by three cruel nails, two through the hands, one through the feet, the knees slightly bent so that the body would hang in the most painful position. His body, since it was a human body after all, quivered with terrible pain, His lips were dry and parched and His throat worked harshly, like a great pulse. Blood dropped steadily from the three great wounds to make a trio of little puddles on Golgotha. His face was streaked as though with sweat, from the blood which the crown of thorns had drawn from His brow and which had dried upon His fevered face. Had His weight rested upon His wide-flung arms alone, His wrists merely bound to the cross-bar, terrible would have been the pain, yet think what unspeakable agony He must have suffered when, His

body sagging heavily as the life went out of Him, it served to widen the wounds in His hands—a tearing ghastly and bloody, that would not cease until He came down from the cross.

Yet, with every reason to hate and despise those who were doing this to Him, His lips moved and I heard the feeble words:

"Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do!"

Give heed, then, to the words of the thief on His left:

"What are you saying, dog of a Nazarene? You who have performed miracles when no one molested you, why do you not command that we be taken down from our crosses? You are a false prophet, whose mouth is full of words. You are more evil than I, for I am a thief and pretend to be nothing else; you are no different than I, except that you have lived a lie. Look at those words above your head! But of course you can not see them. I shall read them to you: 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews!' If ye be indeed a king, and not a liar, command that we be taken down from the cross!"

The Nazarene made no answer. But I saw the increased activity of the pulse in His throat. The thief laughed harshly and cursed the Nazarene with every oath in his vocabulary, heaped His thorn-crowned head with wildly-mouthed obscenities.

When the thief on His right spoke him kindly, I saw Him smile a smile that must have been born in Paradise. I heard Him barely whisper that great promise to the thief who had been kind.

And the people who had brought Him there stood below and waited, wondering why He took so long to die. He thanked the soldier who pressed the vinegar-soaked sponge against His lips.

For several hours we waited there, an expectant multitude. I wondered if the others saw it—that thunderous black cloud which was gathering in the west as it rolled up to hide the face of the dying sun. A cloud that was like a vast tapestry of billowing black smoke. When the face of the sun was hidden and the cloud had closed in upon Golgotha, hiding the cross-bars of the crosses from sight, leaving only the limbs of the dying men in view, I heard, far away in the distance, the menacing roll of approaching thunder. The cloud now covered the earth like a blanket, a blanket that was thick and smothering, broken here and there in flurried rifts across which leaped tongues of fiery lightning—which crisped and crackled like whips that are flicked by invisible hands. Golgotha was heavy beneath the vast and awesome power of a Might Immeasurable.

Down by those who waited, trembling now with a fright which none could understand or explain, came those words of the Great Nazarene in mortal pain:

"Father have mercy!"

Came a rift in the cloud which hovered about the Cross, a rift through which I could see His face—a rift across which darted and crackled those powerful whips of the lightnings. They illumined His face and made it beautiful, a glow of heavenly radiance upon which the waiting multitude looked in fear and awe. But those great eyes were sightless, the thorn-crowned head sunk low.

The soldier raised his spear and pierced the side of the Christ, and the water and the blood gushed forth, while tongues of lightning darted down as though they would cleanse the wound with fire. The soldier, standing with his neck craned upward to view his handiwork, gaped as he saw this, his mouth hanging open like that of a gasping fish. Then he turned and ran, brandishing his

spear to intimidate those who barred his flight.

Jesus of Nazareth had given up the Ghost!

I TURNED to retrace my steps into the city when, borne on the breeze which had dropped down to scatter the clouds which covered Golgotha, there came to my nostrils the vast and terrible effluvium of a thousand cemeteries that had been convulsed until the graves fell open! The ghastly odor of long-dead and decayed mortality! Such an odor as is said forever to hang in the weird atmosphere over Egypt!

I knew what had happened. And my return led through one of the city's cemeteries!

I came to the edge of that cemetery and paused to take in the awesome sight. On all sides of me, open to the air of heaven, gaped the mouths of graves. Stones that had covered many of them for scores of years had been lifted and hurled aside—stones that could not have been moved by half a dozen strong men had been cast upward and aside by the seeking hands of those who had come forth. The graveyard might have been a vast battleground, did one judge from appearances, a battleground upon which had been hurled the equipment of a fleeing army.

For those who had arisen had left their shrouds and cerements at the lips of their tombs! Naked they had gone forth, born again into the world. Near at hand I saw a shroud that had once been white; but that now was yellowish and covered in spots by bits of mold from the bosom of Mother Earth. Here, a little farther away, lay a shroud that would still have been white, had it not been for the drops of dried blood which hinted what manner of death he, or she, who had lain within its ample folds had died.

No odor hung over this field of the dead who had arisen, for the breath of heaven had washed it clean. But there was a smell that reminded me of June mornings, such as I have spent up there in the future with you, when the rain has passed over with the coming of the sun and the earth smells sweet and clean. It hinted of life instead of death. I could almost hear the upward creeping of living plants and grasses that, already, were striving to peep forth from the earth to hide the face of this dread place.

I hurried on into the city, and found myself in the rear of a multitude which moved on ahead of me.

I knew that I walked with those who had just come forth from their graves! Who had just now cast aside their shrouds!

Upon their faces I read many and varied questions. Upon them all sat expressions of inexpressible bewilderment. They but answered in a body to some great mandate, and could not understand why they answered.

Were they glad to be back in the land of the living?

I do not know. But I thought I read in the faces of those nearest me, mingled with the bewilderment which was common to all, a look of brooding discontent. I believed then that, had the dead the right to choose as they would, the graves would nevermore have been opened. The thought of dying but once is terrible, a thought that haunts us all; but when one knows that one must die a second time it seems rather an undeserved punishment than a blessing. Their bodies were whole, as they had been whole in their previous life and, as far as appearances went, it was hard to believe that this multitude had ever been dead.

I hurried on through the marching crowd of the risen dead until I came and walked at its forefront. I was

still the seeker after knowledge. I wished to know what these people would do when they came again into the city whence, moving slowly and in silence, they had gone forth to what the world had called their final resting place.

We found ourselves at the edge of the city. Long before we had reached it, however, we had seen figures of men and women fleeing on ahead, looking back at us as though we were specters that pursued. We heard their frightened cries as they brandished their arms wildly:

"Make way! Make way; for the dead have come forth! Flee for your lives!"

This the greeting to those loved ones who had every right to expect joyous welcomes! Their own people fled from them as though they were filthy with some loathsome plague! Did the people welcome the dead returned? Would they do it up there with you?

The cries had gone ahead of us into the city, and the little army with which I, the invisible entity, marched, was met at the wall by a centurion and his men. He held up his hand to bar our farther progress:

"Stand!" he cried loudly, although I sensed that his voice trembled with fear; "and tell me whence you come, and for what purpose."

Beside me a venerable patriarch folded his arms and gazed into the eyes of the centurion as he answered:

"Know ye, fool of a soldier, that I am Tobias the money-changer! Why are we ordered to stand?"

The soldier made as though to flee, restraining his natural impulse with all his power.

"But I know Tobias the money-changer," he cried, "and I say that he has been dead two years!"

"True," replied the patriarch, "but I say that I am that Tobias; that I am not dead but living!"

The centurion was visibly trembling now.

"Whence come ye?" His voice was barely audible.

"From the graves beyond Golgotha!" replied the patriarch. "We are the dead who have arisen, for what purpose I know not, except that we find ourselves here, received with but scanty welcome. Why are we ordered to stand?"

"Word has gone forth to Pilate that an unknown army marches upon the city—an army without arms in its hands. You stand at his orders."

"Take word to him that the dead have returned and seek entry to the city in order that they may return to their homes!"

The centurion turned and spoke sharply to one of his men, glad of the opportunity to salve his fright with a show of authority.

I LEFT the army of the dead at this place and followed the soldier on until he sought his audience with Pilate. I heard him, panting with his exertions, kneeling before Pilate, repeat his message:

"The word is abroad in the city that the graves have opened and have given up their dead! The dead themselves send word that they wish to return to their homes!"

Pilate arose from his dais and strode forth among his subordinates.

"What is the meaning of this? What riddle are you making me when you speak of the dead arisen?"

"The truth," answered the trembling soldier; "I but repeat the words of Tobias the money-changer, who marches at the head of the resurrected!"

"Did you see him? Are you sure that it is indeed Tobias?"

"Yea, it is Tobias! I knew him well by sight, for he was once high in the counsel of Herod, and was well known! It is indeed he!"

"When did the dead come forth?"

Up spoke an officer of Pilate's guard.

"Word had but just come to us that he who called himself 'King of the Jews' had died on the cross! Immediately afterward came word of an earthquake which caused Golgotha to tremble, and which opened the graves above the dead!"

Pilate's face became a livid mask.

"What is this thing that we have done? Who is He Whom we have given to be crucified? It must never be known that we passed our word for the slaying of a great prophet! They would laugh at us from the ends of the earth! They might even cause another governor to be appointed!"

Pilate looked around him at his people as though he sought for one upon whom to place the blame for this great catastrophe.

One of his subordinates touched him obsequiously upon the shoulder.

"Pilate has spoken well," he said. "It must never be known! I have a plan to prevent certain knowledge from going forth!"

"Speak!" commanded Pilate.

"Beyond the limits of the city," continued the counselor, "there is a settlement of lepers. It is my counsel that these who claim to be the risen dead be sent forth to herd with the lepers. Whenever one goes forth he will be compelled to cry aloud, 'Unclean! Unclean!' and those who see them will shun them. They shall be outcast until they return to their graves nevermore to rise again."

"So be it!" cried Pilate.

The soldier withdrew, and I knew that he dreaded to take this message of Pilate back to the money-changer called Tobias.

I JOURNEYED with the soldier back to the gates of the city, where those who had risen from the dead awaited the pleasure of the Roman governor.

"Know you, Tobias," said the soldier, "that Pilate has ordered that you be sent to herd with the lepers beyond Golgotha. That, having the odor of the grave upon you, you are unclean, and may not hope to mingle with the living."

A dead silence, a terrible awesome silence, fell upon that vast crowd at these words which came from the human mouthpiece of the Roman governor. Tobias crossed his arms and his head sank low upon his breast. A venerable figure, Tobias, and the others who had come forth from their graves seemed to accept him tacitly as leader and spokesman. When the head of the money-changer raised at last, there was a look of sadness on his face that made me think of that haunting look I had seen on the face of the Man Who was Crucified when, looking down upon His torturers, He had cried aloud:

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

Only Tobias said nothing. Slowly his head swerved as his eyes traveled over the faces of those who awaited his decision. His head went back proudly as he began to speak:

"What say you, brethren? You who have come back with me from beyond the Veil of Eternal Shadows? If you had your choice, which would you do—follow the orders of Pilate and live out such new span of life as may be allotted you, among the lepers, unclean, shunned like the pestilence, wallowing in filth? Or would you turn your back once more and lift again that veil from beyond which some vast and awesome miracle must have called us forth?"

The dramatic silence lasted but a few seconds.

Then the answer came—many-throated, resonant, palpitant with the yearnings, the sadness, and the sorrows of souls that have been rudely

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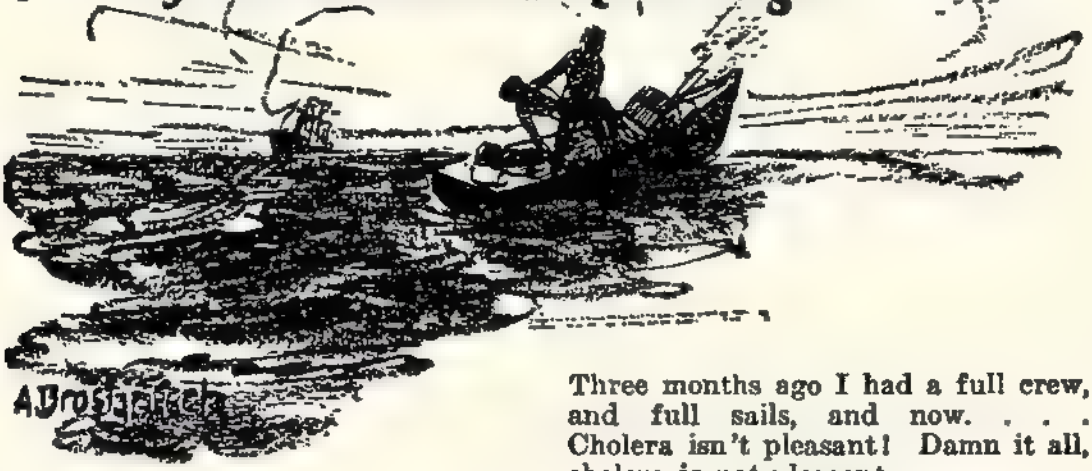
The Sea Thing

by Frank Belknap Long Jr.



JULY 16—We are caught in one of the great calms. There is water in the well, and our food is nearly gone. Everything is hid from view by the fog. I confess that I am a hopeless coward. The situation appalls me. What an expressive word is *despair*. I shall write it large—DESPAIR. Luckily a flying fish came scudding over the rails this morning.

JULY 17—The fog has lifted, but there is no relief in sight, and the water in the well has risen several inches. The seven of us worked on the pumps all night. Thompson seemed surly and inclined to rebel. He is a man to be envied. He still retains his egoism and he fancies himself a very shrewd and important person. I hadn't the heart to be angry with him. Poor devil! He doesn't know how near we are to the rocks. I speak figuratively, of course. We are at present in the open sea, a thousand miles from land, and our rudder has gone by the board. We drift aimlessly. A fine situation, truly, for the skipper of the *Octopus!* Three months ago I had a full crew, and full sails, and now. . . . Cholera isn't pleasant! Damn it all, cholera is *not* pleasant.

JULY 18—I have given up all hope. By working desperately we are able to keep the water in the well from rising, but our food has given out. We have pumped and cursed on empty stomachs for fifteen hours. Bullen collapsed. He collapsed like *the others*, but thank God, his face didn't turn black. We are done with the cholera now. I'll stake my reputation on that. My prompt disposal of the bodies nipped the cholera in the bud. In the bud, did I say? Ha! When a man loses three-fourths of his crew he can't think straight. The cholera really ran its course. It couldn't have lasted much longer. I wish to heaven that it had taken the rest of us.

JULY 19—It was funny. Another flying fish came aboard today, and Tommy Wells made a dive for it. He dived after it head first, with arms akimbo like a man just awakened from some crazy dream, and he slid along the planks. But he got the fish. He caught it between his two hands and bit into it, and finally disposed of it, bones and all. "That

was a devilish thing to do," said Thompson. Big Johnny Boeltzig cursed horribly. I felt rather light in the head, and I didn't say anything. But I was a bit put out. We could have divided the flying fish up, but as I say, it was funny.

JULY 20—Our case is desperate. There isn't a breath of air stirring and Boeltzig has joined Bullen. They are both below, unable to move an arm between them, and Bullen is very near death. Curiously enough, though, the five of us are able to keep the water down. But we are tired—tired.

JULY 21—We have one thing to be thankful for. The water has not risen an inch in twelve hours—and we didn't pump. We are too tired to pump. We lay about on the decks, and cursed and made faces at the sky, and we never mentioned food. But Thompson's tongue stuck out queerly. "Put that rag in your mouth." I shouted. It was a coarse remark to make to a starving man, but I was suffering acutely. Why do I continue to write in this log?

JULY 22—We are saved! Who could have anticipated such glorious good luck? A boatload of provisions and a jolly companion to cheer us up. He claims that he is the sole survivor of the *Princess Clara*. You have undoubtedly heard of the *Princess*. A finer brig never put out from Frisco. And she's gone. A hurricane and a leak did for her. Six or seven got away in the long boat, but my friend (I call him that, because he has saved us all)—my friend threw them overboard. They died first, of course. Get that straight. They died from fright or from drinking salt water, and my friend didn't like the company of corpses. So he just naturally disposed of them. That's his story, and I accept it at its face value. I'm not a man to go poking about and asking questions. It's enough that he's brought us provisions, and jolly companionship. We were growing weary of each other—we seven. He calls himself Francis de la Vega.

JULY 24—De Vegie (we call him that) has been with us now for three days. He has the run of the ship, and I have given him the mate's cabin. The mate has no further need for a cabin, since he spends his nights on the ocean floor. A splendid chap, the mate. He was the first to go. But I mustn't rake up old ashes. De Vegie is tall and amazingly lean, and I never saw a paler man. His face is drawn and haggard, and his eyes large—and they consume you. There is something devastating about his eyes. Sometimes they seem a hundred years old. His forehead is high, and as yellow and dry as parchment, and his nose is curved like a simitar. Strangely enough, he reminds me of Poe's Usher. I say strangely enough, because the man has nothing but his appearance in common with the aristocratic neurotic of Poe's tale. He is boyish, gay and utterly free from gloom. His manner is ingenuous and charming. He is all smiles and assurance. And he tells stories that are almost Rabelaisian in their frank, coarse humor. He possesses a remarkable knowledge of medicine, or perhaps I should say, of healing, since he uses no drugs. But he has completely restored Bullen and big Johnny Boeltzig. The eight of us make a jolly crew. He has given us new life, new confidence. His presence is a delight to us. There is one thing curious about him. His hands are cold and almost lifeless. There is no blood in them. I never before saw such hands on a human being. And the nails are astonishingly long.

JULY 27—De Vegie has kept more to himself. He remained locked in his cabin this morning, and answered my anxious questions through the keyhole. But I was too busy to show surprize. There was a curious chill in the air, which promised wind, and Thompson, Wells and I worked desperately to get up the topgallants and strengthen the weather leaches. The rest were too tired to work and I did not press them. I have no desire to reassert my authority just yet. The first sign of a breeze will increase the crew's morale, and then I hope to regain my old power of discipline.

JULY 28—I am worried about De Vegie. This morning he came on deck looking so drawn and haggard that I left the taffrail where I had been standing with one hand grasping the weather vang and crossed the deck to comfort him. His eyes looked appealingly into mine. "Couldn't sleep all night," he said. "The ship tosses so. The great calms certainly make a ship roll."

"They do," I replied. "But you don't notice the roll so much on deck. If you wish, you may carry your bedding up, and sleep with the boys on the planks. But don't be startled if a flying fish flops in your face."

De Vegie smiled. "Thanks," he said. "The idea appeals to me. I'll act on it tonight."

JULY 29—A breeze is surely coming soon. All of the signs point to it. I have been working frantically on a miserable substitute for a rudder. I think that I shall be able to steer fairly well in a pinch, but I hope the breeze doesn't come until we are better prepared.

De Vegie slept on the planks with the crew last night, and this morning he looks ten years younger. His cheeks are flushed and full, and the greenish hollows have disappeared from under his eyes. But Thompson isn't well. He complains of pains in his chest, and once or twice he spat blood. He is abnormally pale.

JULY 30—Still no breeze. Thompson is sick unto death. He lies in his cabin and groans, and I can do nothing for him. His pallor is genuinely alarming. Even his lips are bloodless. He complains of noises in his ears. And De Vegie has shown his first gleam of ill-nature. "I can do nothing for him," he says, and shrugs his shoulders. His eyes smolder when he speaks, and I discern for the first time a hard cruelty in the man. He is not what he pretends to be!

JULY 31—Thompson died this morning, and De Vegie actually gloated over his death. What does it mean? Why such a sudden change in a man who owes everything to our generosity? It is true that his coming supplied us with food, but we snatched him from the very maws of the sea. That is ingratitude for you! Human beings are utterly despicable, and I have lost faith in them. De Vegie does not differ from the rest. He gloats over the misfortunes of others. He actually smiled when I read the burial service and dropped poor Thompson into the sea. Imagine it!

AUGUST 1—There is still no wind. I should welcome any sort of breeze after what I *felt* today. There is something unnatural about this ship. Even the cook has noticed it. "It ain't natural," he said, "for a ship to smell like this. And that De Vergie's fellow's cabin. Phew! It not only stunk, but——"

I laid my hand over his mouth. "You're an idiot," I shouted. "De Vegie's all right. I don't know what made him smile yesterday when I shipped off poor Thompson, but he

isn't a bad sort." I lowered my voice: "He never complains, and his companionship is jolly stimulating. The boys couldn't get along without him. You have a feeling that he knows more than ten ordinary men whenever he opens his mouth to tell one of his amazing yarns. And that tale of the Spanish Inquisition that he frightened Boeltzig with yesterday morning was so real, so vivid—"

"I allus distrusted him," said the perverse fool. I grimaced, and remarked coolly that nothing could be more absurd than the prejudices of a lazy son of a sea-cook. But I must confess that the smell of De Vegie's cabin did horrify me. I had entered it while De Vegie was on deck, and the stench nearly laid me on my back. The place smelt like a hellish charnel-house. The odor of decaying shell-fish mingled with a peculiarly offensive and acrid smell that in some indefinable way suggested newly-shed blood. There was no sign, however, of anything amiss in the cabin. I was so horrified that I left almost immediately, slamming the door with a bang. Tonight I shall drink heavily. Oh, I shall get gloriously drunk! I shall make a fool of myself, but what does it matter?

August 2—De Vegie has grown hard and cynical. He curses my men and refuses to speak to me. This morning little Tommy Wells went below and lay down. He was as white as a squid's belly. Something told me to examine him. I commanded him to strip, and I searched his entire body for signs of discoloration. I thought that possibly the cholera had taken a new form. Like influenza, cholera may manifest itself in curious and amazing ways. I had never read of cholera draining the blood from a man, but I wasn't taking any chances. Well, it wasn't cholera. It was a bite. Something had bitten him in the chest. A round, circular discoloration disfigured the center of his chest, and in the very middle were two sharp incisions, from which blood and pus trickled ominously. I didn't like it. Neither did Tommy. When he saw the wound he sat up very stiff and straight, and asked me if I knew any tropic insects capable of such devilry.

"There are no insects a thousand miles from land," I shouted. "Don't be such an incredible imbecile!"

Tommy looked at me reproachfully. "Flies," he said. "They're often found on board. You know that just as well as I do. This stinking hold would breed 'em as big as whales. It couldn't have been anything else. I didn't feel it at all—didn't even know that I had the bite."

"There's something more than flies in this, Tommy," I said. "The thing that bit you came out of the sea. Ever see a lamprey's wound on a fish, Tommy?"

"Did I ever see a man walking with his legs!" snapped Tommy. "But how could a lamprey get me? I didn't sleep on the bottom of the sea. I slept on deck, and I was covered up. I suppose your lamprey climbed over the rail, and walked about, and finally decided that I would make a good juicy meal. Then I dare say he lifted the blankets, and crawled under my shirt and fed until morning. He would be wise enough, of course, to get away and over the side before daybreak. Is that your theory, captain?"

I was curiously impatient with the boy. His levity had somehow stung me. "It's a better theory than your flies," I responded.

Tommy smiled grimly, and turned over in his bunk.

August 3—Tonight I went down into the pit. Something *walks* at night in this ship. "The pestilence that walketh at nightfall"—I wonder

if the Hebrew prophet saw what I *felt*. I awoke from a heavy sleep, and something that does *not* sleep was standing above my bed. The cabin was wrapped in a velvety blackness, and I could see nothing, not even a shadow. But I heard it gulp. And I smelt—the odor of decay was so strong that it stung my nostrils. And I heard the thing above me gulp. It didn't breathe or whisper or cry out, but it simply *gulped*. I tried to rise, but it laid its hand on my head and forced me back. And its hand was slimy, like the hand of a frog.

AUGUST 4—An unaccountable incident occurred on deck today. I am obliged to believe that De Vegie is insane. "Red" Walker was working on the braces, and his hand accidentally slipped. He cut himself badly. The blood ran down his arm, and we all feared that he had severed an artery. His under lip trembled, but he didn't complain or cry out. He simply walked with unsteady steps toward the forecastle, while he sought to stanch the flow of blood with his uninjured hand. De Vegie was standing above the lee scuppers, and the sight somehow startled him. He threw up his arms and ran straight for "Red." "Red" saw him coming, and stopped, puzzled and a little hopeful. He recalled De Vegie's power of healing. In a moment De Vegie had seized upon the injured arm. He gripped it forcefully, and *put it under his shirt*. He held "Red" Walker's wrist against his chest, and he seemed horribly excited. His eyes bulged. His cheeks turned gray, and balls of sweat accumulated on his forehead. De Vegie was making a tremendous effort to achieve something—but we couldn't guess what. The situation was uncanny. I stepped forward to interfere, but when I reached them they were free of each other, and "Red" was examining his arm with horror and amazement. "There's no blood in it," he groaned. "And, my God, it's as cold as ice!" De Vegie scowled. "I didn't expect gratitude," he said dryly, "but you have no right to complain. I've fixed your wrist for you. It won't bleed again—for some time!"

I could only stare. Is De Vegie mad, or has he mastered some monstrous system of healing?

AUGUST 5—"Red" Walker is dead. I disposed of his body this morning. It was white and rigid, and I noticed an extraordinary discoloration above the wound on his wrist. From the elbow down, his arm was bright green. I can not explain it. Blood-poisoning, perhaps—but I do not like De Vegie. I no longer trust him. His presence has become obnoxious to me.

Something walked again tonight. It bent above my head, and I heard it gulp.

AUGUST 6—I am stunned, frightened. Who could have dreamed, who could have expected? The thing is so incredible, so hideous, so utterly outside human experience!

I found the book in the ship's library. It was one of forty water-soaked volumes. It was a very ancient book, and the leaves were yellow and the cover eaten away at the corners. It was dated 1823. But that is not strange. Books one hundred years old are not uncommon on clipper ships that should have been scuttled before the beginning of this century.

I had poked among the absurd books out of curiosity, incidentally seeking something to read that would lift me above a gruesome world of sea and sky and walking pestilence.

I turned the pages of the little book rapidly, and laughed at the ridiculous lore that graced its soiled

yellow pages. It was a miscellany, bearing the title, *A Winter's Evening*, and the incongruity of such a book among such surroundings amused and delighted me. And then I discovered the following passage, and I had no longer any desire to laugh:

According to Father Feyjoo, in the month of June, 1674, some young men were walking by the seaside in Bilboa, when one of them, named Francis de la Vega, suddenly leaped into the sea, and disappeared presently.

About five years afterward, some fishermen in the environs of Cadiz perceived the figure of a man swimming and sometimes plunging under the water. It is said that his body was entirely covered with scales. They also added that different parts of his body were as hard as shagreen. Father Feyjoo adds many philosophic reflections on the existence of this phenomenon, and on the means by which a man may be enabled to live at the bottom of the sea!

AUGUST 7—This morning I showed Tommy Wells the miscellany. He read it slowly, and his face actually turned yellow. His small blue eyes narrowed. "We must act at once," he said.

Later—We have made our plans. Tommy and I are to bunk together tonight. We have automatics—and a sharp knife. The knife, we feel, will be necessary. This morning Tommy and I discussed vampirism. "A stake or knife must be driven through the heart," said Tommy. "But a sea-vampire, Tommy," I responded, "is—is different." Tommy shrugged, to conceal the horror and uncertainty in his tired brain. *We are resolved to do everything possible.*

AUGUST 8—It is over! Poor Tommy is gone, but De Vegie will trouble us no more. I am dazed, horrified—but I must write it all. It is a duty I owe to Tommy. He would want it on record. Tommy was always methodical, and he insisted on regulations. I must put it in the log to please Tommy.

We were awake in our bunks when the door opened. We heard the door creak on its hinges. Something unutterable had entered the room. We could hear the thing gulp. Tommy gripped my arm, and I got ready to strike a match. I waited until its soft, slimy approach became unbearable. I waited until it stood at the foot of my bunk and until its green, glassy eyes were vaguely discernible in the almost total blackness. It was watching me, and I realized that it could see in the dark. I lit the match. My hand shook frightfully, but I carried the match to the tallow wick and then—it sprang.

But it didn't spring at me. It went higher, and it got Tommy about the neck. I could hear him choke and gasp. In passing me the thing had knocked the match from my fingers, and we were once more in total darkness. I had seen something long and green and slimy going upward, and I had heard Tommy's frightful scream. But I saw and heard nothing else for the space of thirty or forty seconds. I was unable to move or think. I sat on the edge of my bunk, and my heart came up in my throat and flopped over.

I was conscious of two objects struggling and gasping on the floor. I heard a gulping and a low moaning, and then the night was loud with Tommy's screams. He shrieked, and shrieked, and shrieked. And between the screams there came a torrent of jumbled nouns and adjectives. "Green—eyes! Ugh! Ooze! Mouth! Wet!"

I finally got out another match, and struck it. I kept my eyes averted, and carried the match rapidly to the candle wick. I knew that if my eyes fastened upon the thing on the floor I should drop the match. I waited until the wick flared, and then—I looked!

Something was on top of Tommy. It covered him, and seemed appar-

ently about to absorb him. In its evil, distorted features and long-nailed hands I recognized a caricature of De Vegie. But the evil in the man had sprouted. It had turned him into a jellyish, fishy monstrosity. His legs and arms actually *gave*. They were like nothing in this world under the sun and moon and stars. They lengthened, and enveloped and choked Tommy. But the worst of all, the body of the thing was covered with greenish scales, and it had pink suckers on its chest. The suckers were lustily at work on poor Tommy.

The suckers were draining Tommy dry. His screams kept getting louder and louder. And he muttered pathetic invocations and shameless blasphemies. And his scared eyes watched me. There was a challenge and a mute appeal in them.

I thought of the revolver in my bunk. I turned, and my fingers sought frantically for the weapon. At length I found it. I gripped the butt, and leveled it. I leveled it at Tommy and the thing on the floor.

I fired at Tommy and the thing. I had no intention of sparing Tommy. I knew that Tommy would not want that. The appeal in Tommy's suffering eyes was unmistakable. After that objects refused to retain their identity in my sight. They coalesced and separated and came together again. The objects on the floor merged with the table and chairs and bunk-ends.

I have a vague recollection of carrying two bodies on deck and dumping them overboard. I remember that one body was long and slimy and strangely heavy. The other was amazingly light. Before I carried the long heavy body on deck I drove a knife through its heart. I think that the blood spurted out and spattered my arms and legs. But the memory of this occurrence is more vague than the shadow of a dream. Did the long green body groan when I stabbed it, and did a look of ineffable happiness and gratitude come into its eyes? Did the small body also speak to me before I carried it on deck? Did I later go into De Vegie's cabin and breathe the fresh, clean air that blew through it? I can not answer these questions, but I do not think that they require an answer.

AUGUST 9—A breeze! A breeze! The great calm is broken, and all hands are busy forward. I thank God that by tonight we shall be headed toward Frisco.

A Chinese Tale, With a Shudder at the End

THE FAN

By FRANK OWEN

Author of "The Wind That Tramps the World," "The Lantern-Maker," etc.

LI HSEIN sat before the door of her house, a shapeless huddled figure without form or outline. Once she had been famed for her beauty throughout the length of Canton. The poet who wrote *Songs to the Peonies* must have been thinking of just such a girl when he wrote, "She was of a loveliness to overthrow kingdoms." But now her youth had faded like an old sunset, and even the blush of evening had departed, leaving her wrinkled, scarred and old, her skin yellow and coarse as gooseflesh. The years, like great black ships, had floated silently out to sea and Li Hsein was left alone, a forgotten, broken old stout woman whose loveliness had once been almost legendary.

Her family too had all died, some of grief, some of age, some of subtle illnesses, but they were gone. They had passed through the great door which marks the beginning or the end according to one's point of view. Li Hsein alone remained, Li Hsein and the gorgeous yellow, carmine-splashed fan. Now as she sat by the doorway and the night blackness was drawn by the gods of the mountains like a great blanket up from the plains, the alley in which she dwelt almost vanished into the night mystery which is Canton. Only one shaft of light from within the house still cleft the blackness as though struggling for life. It was a flickering yellow glow and it fell upon the fan shimmering off in a maze of fantastic colors of blended orange shades, yellow and vivid red. It was as though the fan resented the light and flung it back into the alleys. And Li Hsein, a shapeless mass, sat and crooned, forever waving the fan, crooned in a cracked harsh voice, broken melodies, unintelligible gibberish which might have been curses or prayers.

The shifting cycles of time are rather odd to contemplate. A few years and one is flung from one cycle of existence into another. The change is almost as great as the transition from one planet to another. In China the position of woman is on a very low plane, not much better than that of cattle or dogs. She is never allowed to walk beside her husband on the street, seldom is permitted to eat at the same table with him, and if she displeases him he is quite within his rights to beat her into insensibility. But none of these customs applied to Li Hsein. She looked down upon men. She openly sneered at them and they did not resent it. In all of China she was the one free woman.

When she smiled, men could not resist her. Tales are told of how Lu Wong, who was a great merchant, satisfactorily married and a blessing to his mother, left his ancestral home because Li Hsein smiled at him. He neglected his business, his large tea plantations and his banking offices. Failure crashed down to smite him, and when his wealth was gone, gone

also was the smile from the lips of Li Hsein. One morning his body was found half buried in the yellow mud by the river bank. There was no sign of violence upon it, but his lips had been torn from his face.

This was only one of a series of tragedies in which Li Hsein figured. A shipping agent named Chang wooed her. Later he, too, was found in the river mud, lifeless, with his lips missing. On the occasion of this second death people began to talk. No one spoke boldly, but there were vague whisperings. Li Hsein was a witch woman, daughter of a serpent who drank only human blood. Yet there were many who refused to give credence to such fantastic mutterings. Chief among these was Lin Sing, the scholar. Lin was a great philosopher who spent much of his time on the hilltops lost in profound meditation. He was a worshiper of beauty. That which was beautiful, he believed, was divine. When he saw Li Hsein for the first time his heart beat fast with love. She was a divinity, something to be worshiped, more fragrant than a flower, lovelier than a frost-tipped sunset or dawn rising above a yellow sea.

For a summer their love was something to tell about in legend. It put at rest all the vague mutterings about Li Hsein. Greater love there could not be. He adored her.

One day she returned to her home shrieking and crying frantically. Lin Sing, the scholar, was dead and all that life affords had been snatched from her. She wept and moaned and beat upon her breast. She implored the serpent that slept under Canton to devour her. Tragedy stalked that night throughout Canton. Neighbors wept and mourned with her. She and Lin Sing had been rambling through the mountains far from Canton when they were attacked by a mountain lion. Lin Sing had fought the beast with his bare hands and had succeeded in keeping it back until she escaped, but he paid with his life. The wailing of the women who knew her continued until the body of the scholar was found. It had not been scratched. There was no sign of a struggle. But he had been dead for some time and his lips were missing.

After that people commenced to shun the beautiful Li Hsein. They turned from her on the street. They muttered magic words as they passed her door. And she kept on smiling, although she avoided everyone. During those days it was noticed that she had begun carrying the fan, the orange-red fan of fantastic design. She drew it across her face when she met people in the filthy winding alleys of Canton.

The years rolled on. Other lovers came to her home, but they were strangers and no one questioned their coming nor their going. Whether they, too, died, who can say?

Li Hsein never married, and in time her beauty faded, her face became lined and coarse, her lips thickened. All her fine features seemed to slip from their moorings. Her nose grew flatter and the nostrils farther apart. The sheen died out of her hair. Her body grew stouter and stouter until she was but a bloated, shapeless mass. Every night she sat before her doorway with the fan. The years had not been kind to her. Each had extracted a charm from her, until she had no more to give.

One night John Steppling, an American explorer, chanced upon her. She was sitting crooning before her door. Steppling had heard the legends about her, and when she smiled at him, he paused.

"Won't you come in," she said softly, "that I may sing songs to you

such as you have never heard before?"

He accepted her invitation, and with a good deal of groaning and sighing she rose ponderously to her feet, a huge woman waving a monstrous fan. Li Hsein led the way through a dim-lit hallway, into a wide, spacious room beyond, a room of soft blue lights and fragrant colors, hung with rich tapestries. At one end of the room a vessel of incense burned and a slim gray thread of smoke curled up toward a blue-green lantern above. The light was subdued. It was kind to Li Hsein for it seemed to bring back much of youth to her coarse cheeks. It reformed her nose and thinned out her lips. She disappeared through a curtained doorway.

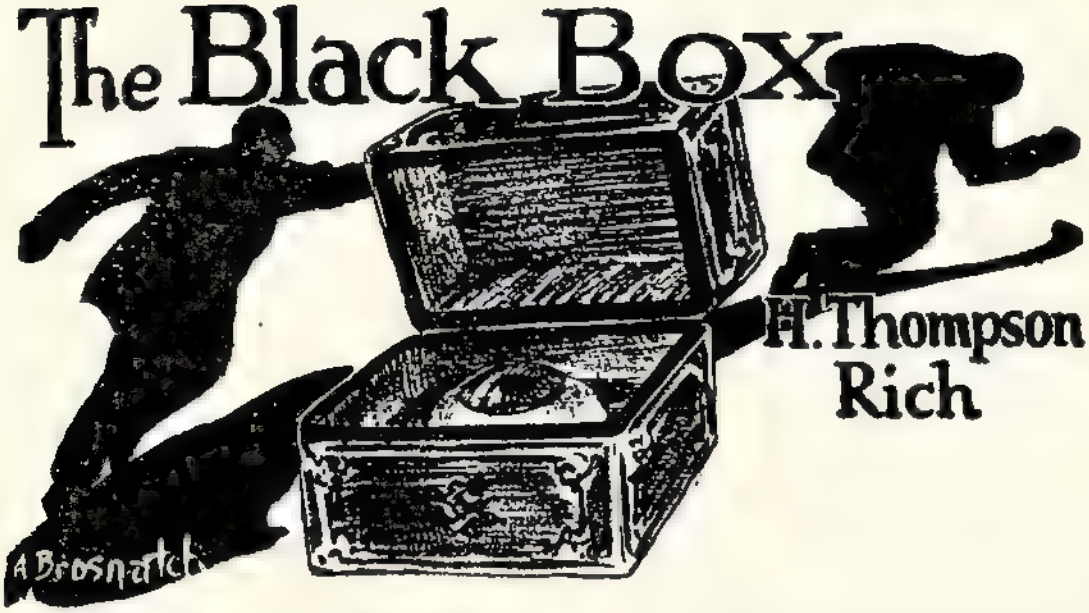
For a few minutes Steppling was left alone in the room wherein the incense burned. At last she returned, and her return marked her transformation. She was attired in a soft clinging orange-red gown and she was carrying the queer fan. She came to the center of the room and commenced to sing. She sang of love and enchantment; of green glades where tiny rivers flowed beneath the willows; of youth and laughter and young love. She sang of flowers, of gorgeous peonies pursued by the sun, and as she sang, other voices joined hers, soft plaintive voices singing in a subdued tone.

The lights had grown somewhat dim. They seemed concentered solely upon her. The far corners were in shadows, but where she stood and gently swayed was a blaze of light. As she sang she seemed to grow young. It was as though with her orange fan she were waving the years away from her. She even looked slim. Her eyes were shining like black jewels, her lips were thin and wondrously red and her teeth were like carved ivory glistening in the night. Her cheeks were flushed and her voice had softened and grown as sweet as a summer breeze caressing garden flowers. And always the voices joined in the singing.

Steppling gazed at her amazed. All the glamor and noises of the alley outside were forgotten. The awful stench which is the heritage of Canton was drowned in the incense burning in the bowl. He was hypnotized by the glory of Li Hsein even as all her other lovers had succumbed to her enchantments. In reality she was an old woman, but when she sang of love she became young, for love has no age. And Steppling could feel himself drawn toward her even against his will. It was as though he were turned to stone, powerless to move. The appeal of Li Hsein was a drug more subtle than opium or hasheesh. He struggled to free himself from the invisible bonds that held him to her. He shifted his gaze from Li Hsein to the fan, and as he gazed at it steadily, the vivid red patches took form. They were moving. They were lips and they were singing. They were joining in the songs of Li Hsein. It was an awful moment. All those mouths out of which the fan was made were moving horribly. Soft sounds came from them to blend with the voice of Li Hsein.

Steppling gasped. He sprang to his feet. He had broken the bonds. He was free, he could move again. Li Hsein paused. She ceased to sing. The light died from her eyes, the pungent color ebbed from her cheeks, her nose widened, her lips thickened and her body lost its allure. She made an effort to arrest his flight, but he pushed her away so violently that she slipped and fell. Once only he turned and glanced back. Her prostrate body lay beneath the green-blue lantern. The huge fan had fallen over her face, and it trembled and moved as though all the red lips that composed it were seeking hers.

The Black Box



H. Thompson Rich

WHEN they told me Ainsworth had been committed to an asylum for the insane—Ainsworth, the comrade of years—at first I could hardly believe it. He had always seemed so sensible, so strong of mind.

But when a scribbled note from him finally reached me, I could no longer doubt. Insane he certainly was, and apparently in a condition bordering on the maudlin.

I give you the note as he penned it—though nothing less than the original scrawl could possibly serve to convey anything like a correct impression of his mental state.

My dear Conway:

In the first place I am not insane. I am as rational as you are. Surely, old fellow, you must know me well enough to know better than that my mind could be unbalanced. Why they have put me in this terrible place I can not imagine—unless it is more of Herrington's diabolic revenge.

He has murdered my wife and now he wants to murder me. Yes, *murdered* her! That is what he has done. Oh God, but it is harrowing!

I have a story, Conway—but only you shall ever hear it. If you care to, come; if not, then silence. I haven't long to live.

In great agitation,

AINSWORTH.

These are the words, but the scrawl and blur of the writing were so great as to make it almost unintelligible. Lines were written over lines and there were almost incessant scratches and erasures. I was three days puzzling out the contents before I was able to read the letter in the form above. Then I went, for I knew that somewhere in his crazed mind there was a powerful reason for his desire to see me.

I found him in a worse condition than I had imagined. In fact, on my arrival at the asylum, it was only with the greatest difficulty that I was admitted to his cell.

"He is mad—positively mad," they told me. "He raves continually. In his frenzy he is likely to do you harm."

"Nonsense," I said. "He asked me to come, and I must see him. He knows me too well to harm me, even in his present agitation."

So they admitted me to his cell at last.

As I entered, taking cognizance of the pitiful surroundings, his eyes met mine with a sad, unsteady look. At first he failed to recognize me,

then deep within those phantom pools some remembrance seemed to flame.

"Conway!" he exclaimed, half inaudibly. "So you have come. I rather thought you would. You see, I am not insane."

"Yes, I see," I managed to say.

"Well," he broke in, "I suppose they have told you a lot of lies. They've got me down for a murderer—but I swear, as there is a God in heaven, my hands are clean. At any rate, it was not my wife. Herrington I might have murdered—and even so, I could take oath he lives. But that is the story. Do you care to hear it?"

"Yes," I answered. "And yet, Ainsworth, if the telling is to cause you pain, I'd rather not."

"Nothing of the sort," he hastened in reply, with some show of his old bruskness. "If you really are willing, I'll tell you. But I must be brief, for those guards will come presently and take you away. I am seldom allowed the luxury of a visitor any more, and then only for a few minutes."

With that he seated himself and entered into the most amazing account that it has ever been my fortune, good or ill, to hear.

"You remember reading in the papers of my engagement, and subsequently of my marriage? The woman, as you recall, was a Southern lady of rare beauty. I met her after my last hunting trip together with you, and you have never seen her except for the pictures in the papers, which quite failed to do her justice. Fred, old fellow, she was handsome—and you know that my eye was never an easy one to please. Need I tell you more?

"It was while on a visit to my uncle's plantation in Alabama that I met her, at one of the big week-end affairs where all the beauty of the South seemed gathered together. And yet even in such a coterie of charm she stood out easily from the rest.

"I was attracted to her at once, and, in spite of the dark-complexioned gentleman who seemed to be her most ardent admirer, I lost no time in meeting her and getting acquainted.

"He eyed me with suspicion and ill-concealed jealousy. But I was never a man to fear a fellow man, especially in the matter of a woman. I laughed at him and took her away. We danced and talked, and I managed to be with her the greater part of the evening. Her name, I learned, was Aline—and I called her that.

"When the time came to go home it was I who escorted her, and the last I saw of her dark admirer was an open look of hate he flung at me from the veranda as I helped her into the waiting coach. Then we drove off, leaving him standing there in a burning rage.

"Acquaintance rapidly deepened to friendship, and friendship to love. I asked for her hand and she accepted me. The engagement was announced. We were to be married in the fall.

"Then it was, one night in midsummer—how well I recall the odor of jasmine that hung in the air!—I was awakened from sleep by the stealthy opening of a window, and rising suddenly from my bed I saw silhouetted against the moonlight a dark figure. Even as I looked I caught a flash of gleaming steel in its left hand.

"'Herrington!' I cried, leaping from my bed. 'What are you doing here?'

"'Damn you!' he spat out through clenched teeth, and I rather fancied I detected the tremor of intoxication in his voice. 'I have come here to kill you! You shall never have her! She is mine!'

"With that he sprang upon me, and I had barely time to guard myself before I was in his clutches.

"Being a strong man, I would not have feared him in the daytime, but in the night, with that deadly dagger in his hand, I realized that the chances favored him.

"Even as the thought of death flashed through my mind there came a sudden chill in my back, near the shoulder.

" 'You have stabbed me!' I cried, and my mind went faint.

"But only for a moment, for suddenly I saw that he had drawn the dagger out and held it ready to strike again. Straight over my heart I saw it poise, saw it descend—when summoning all my strength, I grappled him about the waist, flinging him heavily to the floor. Then I leapt upon him, seized the wrist that held the deadly knife and fairly crushed it in the grip of my hand. He uttered a cry of pain, his fingers relaxed, and the weapon fell to the floor.

"Seizing it, I flung it out of the window, where I saw it sway glitteringly through the moonlight, and vanish. Then I hurled myself upon him with all the frenzy of madness.

" 'So you would take my life!' I muttered in a low voice, fearful lest someone in one of the adjoining rooms should hear. 'So you came here seeking to kill me!'

"Of a sudden my mind seemed to leave me. Scarcely knowing what I did, I reached for his throat. With all the strength I could summon, I sank my fingers into his fleshy neck. I felt them press against his windpipe and I heard him gasp. Then, as the frenzy grew, I relaxed my hold on his throat and my tense fingers crept over his face. I came upon his eyes, and with a fury that had never before been aroused in me, I sank my thumb into his left eyesocket and in an instant had gouged the eye bodily from its fixture and had flung it away, leaving him there, half frantic with pain, in a horrible pool of blood.

"Then I came to. My mind cleared and I realized what a fearful thing it was that I had just perpetrated against a fellow being, and my heart sickened with horror and remorse.

"What was I going to do? Morning would come and they would find him there. Perhaps he would die before morning and I would be judged his murderer.

" 'He must not be found!' I exclaimed in a low voice, thinking of my love for Aline and the marriage that was near at hand. 'For her sake, for the sake of our happiness, which we have a right to, he shall not be found!'

"Suddenly I turned again to him in the darkness. He was half conscious, and moaning feebly.

" 'Herrington,' I whispered, 'you came here to murder me. You inflamed my mind, and but for the grace of God you would now be dead. Your life is in my hands. You have willed it so. Therefore I offer you one chance. Either leave this room and this house and this state forever, or I will kill you as you lie here and carry you to the marsh. There I will sink your body among the reeds, where it will never be found. And Aline and I will be happy. Choose! Either get up at once and go, or you die!'

"He groaned, and his single remaining eye opened and looked wildly at me there in the moonlight. I shall never forget its stare.

" 'I—I will go,' he gasped, and sank once more into unconsciousness.

" 'What a pitiable beast he is!' I thought. 'How dimly the spark of life smolders within his breast! A little more punishment and—the end.

" 'But he shall live!' I cried, and I bent over him again.

Taking his scarf, I bandaged it around his bleeding and empty eye-socket, and tied it in a firm knot at the back of his head. Then I got out a bottle of brandy, and putting the neck to his mouth, poured half a glass of its fiery contents forcibly down his throat.

"As the fumes of the strong liquor rose to his nostrils and the burning spirits rushed against his palate, impelling him to swallow, he gave a violent shiver and sat up.

"'There,' I said, helping him to his feet, 'that is what you needed. And now, come with me. Here!' I put the bottle in his pocket. 'Take this along with you. You may have to use it before morning.'

"Stealthily I led him from my room and down the stairs to the hall below.

"We walked together across the veranda and descended the short flight of steps, then out over the road, keeping on until we were a good half-mile from my uncle's house. Then I paused.

"'Now,' I said, 'out of my sight forever! If you ever cross my path again, I'll kill you as I would a dog. Good-bye—and remember!'

"'Good-bye,' he muttered, as he staggered away. 'And oh, I will be revenged for this!'

"That is the last I ever saw of him, and whether he lived to reach some adjacent town and receive the medical attention he so sorely needed, or whether he wandered off into the lonely swamp and was drowned, I know not. From his condition it would seem almost impossible that he could have walked the five or ten miles that would have meant life to him. And yet from what subsequently occurred, I would say that he must indeed have reached help and must still be alive.

"At any rate, by the living God, he has had his revenge! That Aline is dead, that I am here today, is the work of Herrington. Of that I am convinced—yet of the living man or of the spirit that lives after death, I know not. But the time is brief. Presently the guards will come and you will have to leave. Let me relate the rest and you shall judge for yourself.

"I RETURNED to the house that night and removed from my room every trace of the fearful crime I had perpetrated. Carefully I rubbed the blood stains from the floor. Carefully I rearranged everything so that no sign of the struggle could ever be visible. Carefully I bandaged my wounded shoulder and disposed of my bloody garments. I even went to the garden below my window and found the knife I had flung there, carrying it to the river and hurling it forever out of sight. Then I tiptoed back to the house once more, locking every door just as I had found it, and returned to my own chamber.

"Had it not been for one odd though apparently trivial circumstance, I would have slept more or less peacefully the remainder of the night. But, due to a single curious fact, I lay awake, tossing for hours, unable to quiet my nerves to slumber. The thing seemed incredible, but nevertheless it was so—the eye I had gouged from Herrington's head was not to be found anywhere in the room. Though I searched the chamber minutely, I could discover no trace of it. So, agitated and ill at ease, I at last gave up the search and got into bed, where I lay wakeful all the long hours till dawn.

"When the morning came, however, my nerves seemed to steady themselves somewhat. I got up, and after I had shaved and dressed, I felt almost myself again. In fact, at breakfast I even remarked that I had been troubled with insomnia the night before, thus allaying the sus-

picions of anyone who might possibly have heard the struggles that had issued from my room. But apparently no one had, for the remark did not engender any reply and the conversation rapidly turned to other things.

"That morning the whole party went for a tramp over the plantation, visiting the various negroes' cabins and overseers' quarters. I walked with Aline and, as I gazed upon her, I thought she had never seemed lovelier. An unusually rosy color suffused her cheeks and a spontaneous and girlish vivacity manifested itself in her every action. Her eyes looked up frankly and innocently into mine, and as I looked back at her with half-lowered lids, my soul almost shrank within me. In that moment I realized that with my deed of the night before I had sacrificed forever the joy of frank and happy companionship which would otherwise have been hers and mine, for nevermore would I be able to meet that clear, wondrous gaze, and always there would now be between us an invisible, blood-red barrier—and the memory of a ghastly human eye and a hideous empty socket.

"But somehow the days passed, and gradually I gained back my old composure. By a heroic struggle of mind I was freeing myself of the morbidity that had at first hovered about me like a fog. Herrington had been as the dead and I was beginning to think that the episode was over, except that every now and then some memory of that hideous night would flash phantomlike across my brain, to be wiped out almost immediately by a snatch of melody or a burst of merriment from gracious and charming Aline.

"With the first days of fall came our marriage. Never will I forget the festivities of that day. I was happier than I had ever hoped to be in this life. All memory of Herrington and my crime were now forgotten, and I entered into the spirit of my wedding with a glad and open heart.

"Many and beautiful were the gifts that were showered upon us. Aline was like a diamond in a setting of emeralds and rubies and opals and every manner of precious stones.

"One gift, however, stood out from all the rest. That was a black box, small and antique, fantastically carved on every side with ancient Chinese or Japanese figures. But the curious thing about this box was not the carving, but the fact that it came to us by post on the day of the wedding, with no hint as to the identity of the sender. Even this, curious as it seemed, was not the most peculiar thing about the box. The thing that struck me as strangest, and that gave me a feeling of foreboding such as I can not describe—an odd, peculiar sensation of fear and suspicion—was that I was unable, after the minutest examination, to find any method of opening the box. In fact it seemed not to be a box at all, but a solid cube of ebony or some other dark, heavy substance.

"But why should anyone wish to send us a mere specimen of some antique Oriental carving? Surely it must be a box, and being a box, must have an opening somewhere, must in truth contain something. But as I have said, in spite of the fact that I went over it carefully, I found no opening, nor did I discover any hidden spring about it upon whose touch the lid might fly open, as in certain similar boxes I had seen while in various parts of the world.

"And I would to heaven I had never learned it was in reality a box! I would it and its awful secret had forever remained unknown! But such was not to be. Prompted by a desire to learn the nature of this mysterious gift, I took it with me to

the banquet in my uncle's house the night of our wedding, and in the course of the merriment that followed, laying it on the table, I arose and lifting my glass, offered a toast: 'Here's to the Black Box. Fortune attend whoever shall open it!'

"They all raised their glasses and the toast was drunk. Immediately afterward, my uncle, who was seated at my right, took the box and started it around the table. As it came into the hands of each guest, he or she would turn it over, shake it, examine it, press it and in every way try to discover its hidden secret.

"It had perhaps passed half-way around and I had quite forgotten it and was talking and laughing with Aline, my wife, when suddenly there came a scream of horror, and everyone immediately looked in the direction whence it had issued.

"There sat Mrs. FitzHerron, the box open in her shaking hand, lying across the table in a half faint.

" 'My God!' I remember hearing Uncle Henry exclaim; and, leaping to his feet, he rushed to her. Bending over her, he took the box from her hand and peered inside, when with a low cry he dropped it and stood there trembling, pale as death. I leapt to my feet and asked him what the matter was.

"He turned, and with eyes that seemed dazed he looked at me and his lips moved.

" 'That box!' he said. 'For God's sake, Ainsworth—Herrington——'

"Then he stopped, his lips compressed.

" 'Where is it?' he suddenly demanded.

"And then I looked. It had fallen to the floor and snapped shut. Stooping, I picked it up and attempted to hand it to him.

" 'Take it!' he said, drawing back, and an unaccountable expression crept across his face. 'Take it, and for God's sake, *keep it shut!*'

"So I took it, wonderingly, and set it down on the table beside me.

"Aline picked it up and began regarding it with increased curiosity.

"Meanwhile some of the men had succeeded in reviving Mrs. FitzHerron, and she sat there listening, positively pallid. Uncle Henry bent over to her.

" 'Did you see it?' I thought I heard him whisper.

" 'Yes,' she replied slowly, hardly able to speak. 'Herrington's——'

" 'Later!' said Uncle Henry, checking her. 'No more, here.'

"Then he turned and addressed the table.

" 'Mrs. FitzHerron is not feeling well. If you will excuse me, I will escort her home.'

"With that the two of them left together.

"What passed between them I shall never know, but when my uncle returned, he took me aside.

" 'Frank,' he said, 'I am not going to question you about that box. Whatever it is, it is your affair, and not mine. But I am going to insist that if you and Aline wish to remain under this roof you must get rid of it. I refuse to have it in this house over night.'

" 'Why?' I replied. 'I do not understand.'

" 'I am not so sure you do not understand,' he said slowly. 'That is between you and your conscience. But I insist that you get rid of the box—at once.'

" 'Very well,' I said dully, and left to carry out his wish.

"THE whole affair had thrown a damper on the party, and they were now breaking up and leaving for their rooms, those who were staying with my uncle; and the rest were taking their carriages and driving off. In half an hour everyone had either retired or left.

"But the box—where was it? For the moment I could not think where I had left it. Then I remembered last seeing it on the banquet table where I had laid it after Uncle Henry refused to touch it. Hastily I ran to the banquet room. It was gone.

"Then I noted the absence of Aline.

"'She has doubtless gone to her room,' I thought.

"And swift as a flash the realization came that the dread box had last been in her hands. She had been exceptionally curious about it. What if she were even now attempting to open it?

"In an agony of apprehension and dread I rushed upstairs. I must get it away from her! She, most of all, must never see its contents!

"Dashing into her room, I turned on the light.

"'Aline,' I called.

"There was no answer.

"'Aline, where are you?' I repeated the call.

"Still there was no answer.

"Suddenly a wave of terror engulfed me. Had she opened the box? Had its dread contents exerted some horrible spell on her? Oh, my fair young wife! I turned from the library and ran into our bedroom.

"'Aline!' I called once more.

"There came no sound but my voice, which echoed strangely in the still room. Striking a match, I lit one of the tall candles on the dresser, and by its first feeble ray I saw her. There she lay, in a little crumpled heap on the bed, in her hand the black box—*shut*. Bending over her, I took it gently from her hand and laid it aside.

"'Aline,' I whispered, 'answer me. What is it? Are you ill?'

"She didn't move. In a frenzy of fear, I laid my hand over her heart. There came no answering beat, and as I looked at her eyes a sudden icy chill struck me to the heart. They were glazed and on her lips was the frost of death.

"With a moan, I flung myself upon her.

"'Aline! Aline!'

"Again and again I called her name, but the only answer was the echo of my voice, which reverberated out of the room and down the dark, still corridors of the old mansion.

"In a frenzy of anguish, I seized her, I held her close to me and implored her to speak. I stroked her soft, dark hair, and kissed those pale, cold lips. But she made no move. She was dead.

"I think it was then that the madness came upon me, if I *am* mad. I seized the box and struggled to open it. Madly I worked over it. I stamped on it, bit it, flung it against the wall. I prayed, screamed, cursed over it, but it would not open. Finally, in a fit of insane, hopeless rage, I seized an enormous andiron from the grate and with all my strength brought the heavy metal piece crushing down upon that dark, mysterious box. The impact was sufficient. The lid flew off, shattered, and there it lay—with the mystery all revealed.

"TAKING the candle from the dresser, I brought it over and peered down into the recess of the box. As I looked, a wild cry escaped me. I looked again. I could not believe my eyes at the dread horror that lay therein. Seizing the box in both hands, I held it close to the candle and gazed straight into it and beheld—and beheld (Oh God! I know not how I can ever tell it without being utterly engulfed in madness!) —beheld there in that dark recess, rolling and gleaming as if set in a

socket, staring straight at me, the hideous, bloody eye I had torn from Herrington's head on that tragic, never-to-be-forgotten or expiated night!

"As I looked into that awful orb and as it looked back at me, I felt my reason go. Fascinated, I gazed on and on; and the more I looked, the more hideous became the stare that met my stare. How long I sat there, spellbound, hypnotized, I do not know. Finally, it seems hours afterward, I rose, and with a wild, hysterical laugh, lifted the eye out of its socket in that awful box and, putting it between my teeth, *crunched it*, spitting it out upon the floor a mangled pulp.

"Then, laughing deliriously, I took the box itself and hurled it through the window—into the night. I heard the glass tinkle, I heard the box strike on the ground below. Then I flung myself into a chair and laughed loud and long. It seemed as if I should never stop laughing.

"And there they found me. Ha, ha! Even yet, when I think of it, I must laugh. Ha, ha! Ha, ha!"

I DREW back, sickened, as Ainsworth's maudlin laughter rang through the steel corridors of the madhouse.

That is all. Shortly afterward I left him. Three months later he died—died laughing, laughing insanely.

The Ghost Girl

***By* WILLIAM JAMES PRICE**

We parted at the door.
No angry word was said.
One found you stark upon the floor,
And told me you were dead.

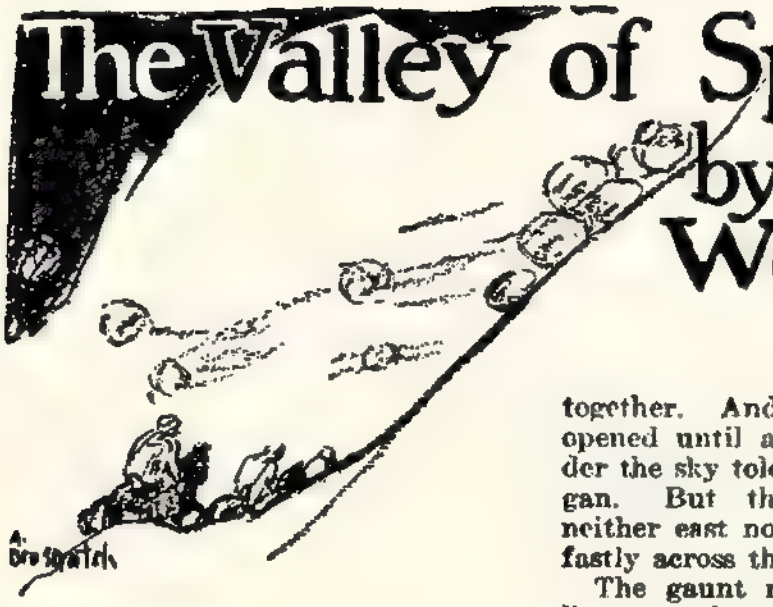
Yet never moon shall rise,
Nor sun at evening set,
But I shall feel your flaming eyes
Whose fire I would forget.

And when the shadows creep
Along these ghostly walls,
A phantom wakes me out of sleep
With eery voice that calls.

Alas! am I to blame
Because you love too well?
Why should you nightly call my name,
Your sorry tale to tell?

To that mysterious bourn
Where happy souls abide
Return again, that I who mourn
May *know* that you have died!

The Valley of Spiders by H.G. Wells



TOWARDS midday the three pursuers came abruptly round a bend in the torrent bed upon the sight of a very broad and spacious valley. The difficult and winding trench of pebbles along which they had tracked the fugitives for so long, expanded to a broad slope, and with a common impulse the three men left the trail, and rode to a little eminence set with olive-dun trees, and there halted, the two others, as became them, a little behind the man with the silver-studded bridle.

For a space they scanned the great expanse below them with eager eyes. It spread remoter and remoter, with only a few clusters of sere thorn bushes here and there, and the dim suggestions of some now waterless ravine, to break its desolation of yellow grass. Its purple distances melted at last into the bluish slopes of the further hills—hills it might be of a greener kind—and above them invisibly supported, and seeming indeed to hang in the blue, were the snowclad summits of mountains—that grew larger and bolder to the north-westward as the sides of the valley drew together. And westward the valley opened until a distant darkness under the sky told where the forests began. But the three men looked neither east nor west, but only stedfastly across the valley.

The gaunt man with the scarred lip was the first to speak. "Nowhere," he said, with a sigh of disappointment in his voice. "But after all, they had a full day's start."

"They don't know we are after them," said the little man on the white horse.

"*She* would know," said the leader bitterly, as if speaking to himself

"Even then they can't go fast. They've got no beast but the mule, and all today the girl's foot has been bleeding——"

The man with the silver bridle flashed a quick intensity of rage on him. "Do you think I haven't seen that?" he snarled.

"It helps, anyhow," whispered the little man to himself.

The gaunt man with the scarred lip stared impassively. "They can't be over the valley," he said. "If we ride hard——"

He glanced at the white horse and paused.

"Curse all white horses!" said the man with the silver bridle, and turned to scan the beast his curse included.

The little man looked down between the melancholy ears of his steed.

"I did my best," he said.

The two others stared again across the valley for a space. The gaunt man passed the back of his hand across the scarred lip.

"Come up!" said the man who owned the silver bridle, suddenly. The little man started and jerked his rein, and the horse hoofs of the three made a multitudinous faint pattering upon the withered grass as they turned back towards the trail. . . .

They rode cautiously down the long slope before them, and so came through a waste of prickly, twisted bushes and strange dry shapes of horny branches that grew amongst the rocks, into the levels below. And there the trail grew faint, for the soil was scanty, and the only herbage was this scorched dead straw that lay upon the ground. Still, by hard scanning, by leaning beside the horses' necks and pausing ever and again, even these white men could contrive to follow after their prey.

There were trodden places, bent and broken blades of the coarse grass, and ever and again the sufficient intimation of a footmark. And once the leader saw a brown smear of blood where the half-caste girl may have trod. And at that under his breath he cursed her for a fool.

The gaunt man checked his leader's tracking, and the little man on the white horse rode behind, a man lost in a dream. They rode one after another, the man with the silver bridle led the way, and they spoke never a word. After a time it came to the little man on the white horse that the world was very still. He started out of his dream. Besides the little noises of their horses and equipment, the whole great valley kept the brooding quiet of a painted scene.

Before him went his master and his fellow, each intently leaning forward to the left, each impassively moving with the paces of his horse; their shadows went before them—still, noiseless, tapering attendants; and nearer a crouched cool shape was his own. He looked about him. What was it had gone? Then he remembered the reverberation from the banks of the gorge and the perpetual accompaniment of shifting, jostling pebbles. And, moreover—? There was no breeze. That was it! What a vast, still place it was, a monotonous afternoon slumber. And the sky open and blank, except for a somber veil of haze that had gathered in the upper valley.

He straightened his back, fretted with his bridle, puckered his lips to whistle, and simply sighed. He turned in his saddle for a time, and stared at the throat of the mountain gorge out of which they had come. Blank! Blank slopes on either side with never a sign of a decent beast or tree—much less a man. What a land it was! What a wilderness! He dropped again into his former pose.

It filled him with a momentary pleasure to see a wry stick of purple-black flash out into the form of a snake, and vanish amidst the brown. After all, the infernal valley *was* alive. And then, to rejoice him still more, came a little breath across his face, a whisper that came and went, the faintest inclination of a stiff black-antlered bush upon a little crest, the first intimations of a possible breeze. Idly he wetted his finger, and held it up.

He pulled up sharply to avoid a collision with the gaunt man, who had stopped at fault upon the trail. Just at that guilty moment he caught his master's eye looking towards him.

For a time he forced an interest in the tracking. Then, as they rode on again, he studied his master's shadow and hat and shoulder, appearing and disappearing behind the gaunt man's nearer contours. They had ridden four days out of the very limits of

the world into this desolate place, short of water, with nothing but a strip of dried meat under their saddles, over rocks and mountains, where surely none but these fugitives had ever been before—for *that!*

And all this was for a girl, a mere wilful child! And the man had whole cityfuls of people to do his basest bidding—girls, women! Why in the name of passionate folly *this* one in particular? asked the little man, and scowled at the world, and licked his parched lips with a blackened tongue. It was the way of the master, and that was all he knew. Just because she sought to evade him. . . .

His eye caught a whole row of high plumed canes bending in unison, and then the tails of silk that hung before his neck flapped and fell. The breeze was growing stronger. Somehow it took the stiff stillness out of things—and that was well.

"Hullo!" said the gaunt man.

All three stopped abruptly.

"What?" asked the master. "What?"

"Over there," said the gaunt man, pointing up the valley.

"What?"

"Something coming towards us."

And as he spoke a yellow animal crested a rise and came bearing down upon them. It was a big wild dog, coming before the wind, tongue out, at a steady pace, and running with such an intensity of purpose that he did not seem to see the horsemen he approached. He ran with his nose up, following, it was plain, neither scent nor quarry. As he drew nearer the little man felt for his sword. "He's mad," said the gaunt rider.

"Shout!" said the little man, and shouted.

The dog came on. Then when the little man's blade was already out, it swerved aside and went panting by them and past. The eyes of the little man followed its flight. "There was no foam," he said. For a space the man with the silver-studded bridle stared up the valley. "Oh, come on!" he cried at last. "What does it matter?" and jerked his horse into movement again.

The little man left the insoluble mystery of a dog that fled from nothing but the wind, and lapsed into profound musings on human character. "Come on!" he whispered to himself. "Why should it be given to one man to say 'Come on!' with that stupendous violence of effect? Always, all his life, the man with the silver bridle has been saying that. If *I* said it—!" thought the little man. But people marveled when the master was disobeyed even in the wildest things. This half-caste girl seemed to him, seemed to everyone, mad—blasphemous almost. The little man, by way of comparison, reflected on the gaunt rider with the scarred lip, as stalwart as his master, as brave and, indeed, perhaps braver, and yet for him there was obedience, nothing but to give obedience duly and stoutly. . .

Certain sensations of the hands and knees called the little man back to more immediate things. He became aware of something. He rode up beside his gaunt fellow. "Do you notice the horses?" he said in an undertone.

The gaunt face looked interrogation.

"They don't like this wind," said the little man, and dropped behind as the man with the silver bridle turned upon him.

"It's all right," said the gaunt-faced man.

They rode on again for a space in silence. The foremost two rode downcast upon the trail, the hindmost man watched the haze that crept down the vastness of the valley, nearer and nearer, and noted how the wind grew in strength moment by moment. Far away on the left he

saw a line of dark bulks—wild hogs perhaps, galloping down the valley, but of that he said nothing, nor did he remark again upon the uneasiness of the horses.

And then he saw first one and then a second great white ball, a great shining white ball like a gigantic head of thistle-down, that drove before the wind athwart the path. These balls soared high in the air, and dropped and rose again and caught for a moment, and hurried on and passed, but at the sight of them the restlessness of the horses increased.

Then presently he saw that more of these drifting globes—and then soon very many more—were hurrying towards him down the valley.

They became aware of a squealing. Athwart the path a huge boar rushed, turning his head but for one instant to glance at them, and then hurling on down the valley again. And at that, all three stopped and sat in their saddles, staring into the thickening haze that was coming upon them.

"If it were not for this thistle-down—" began the leader.

But now a big globe came drifting past within a score of yards of them. It was really not an even sphere at all, but a vast, soft, ragged, filmy thing, a sheet gathered by the corners, an aerial jelly-fish, as it were, but rolling over and over as it advanced, and trailing long, cobwebby threads and streamers that floated in its wake.

"It isn't thistle-down," said the little man.

"I don't like the stuff," said the gaunt man.

And they looked at one another.

"Curse it!" cried the leader. "The air's full of it up there. If it keeps on at this pace long, it will stop us altogether."

An instinctive feeling, such as lines out a herd of deer at the approach of some ambiguous thing, prompted them to turn their horses to the wind, ride forward for a few paces, and stare at that advancing multitude of floating masses. They came on before the wind with a sort of smooth swiftness, rising and falling noiselessly, sinking to earth, rebounding high, soaring—all with a perfect unanimity, with a still, deliberate assurance.

Right and left of the horsemen the pioneers of this strange army passed. At one that rolled along the ground, breaking shapelessly and trailing out reluctantly into long grappling ribbons and bands, all three horses began to shy and dance. The master was seized with a sudden unreasonable impatience. He cursed the drifting globe roundly. "Get on!" he cried; "get on! What do these things matter? How *can* they matter? Back to the trail!" He fell swearing at his horse and sawed the bit across its mouth.

He shouted aloud with rage. "I will follow that trail, I tell you!" he cried "Where is the trail?"

He gripped the bridle of his prancing horse and searched amidst the grass. A long and clinging thread fell across his face, a gray streamer dropped about his bridle-arm, some big, active thing with many legs ran down the back of his head. He looked up to discover one of those gray masses anchored as it were above him by these things and flapping out ends as a sail flaps when a boat comes about—but noiselessly.

He had an impression of many eyes, of a dense crew of squat bodies, of long, many-jointed limbs hauling at their mooring ropes to bring the thing down upon him. For a space he stared up, reining in his prancing horse with the instinct born of years of horsemanship. Then the flat of a sword smote his back, and a blade flashed overhead and cut the drifting balloon of spider-web free, and the

whole mass lifted softly and drove clear and away.

"Spiders!" cried the voice of the gaunt man. "The things are full of big spiders! Look, my lord!"

The man with the silver bridle still followed the mass that drove away.

"Look, my lord!"

The master found himself staring down at a red smashed thing on the ground that, in spite of partial obliteration, could still wriggle unavailing legs. Then when the gaunt man pointed to another mass that bore down upon them, he drew his sword hastily. Up the valley now it was like a fog bank torn to rags. He tried to grasp the situation.

"Ride for it!" the little man was shouting. "Ride for it down the valley."

What happened then was like the confusion of a battle. The man with the silver bridle saw the little man go past him slashing furiously at imaginary cobwebs, saw him cannon into the horse of the gaunt man and hurl it and its rider to earth. His own horse went a dozen paces before he could rein it in. Then he looked up to avoid imaginary dangers, and then back again to see a horse rolling on the ground, the gaunt man standing and slashing over it at a rent and fluttering mass of gray that streamed and wrapped about them both. And thick and fast as thistle-down on waste land on a windy day in July, the cobweb masses were coming on.

The little man had dismounted, but he dared not release his horse. He was endeavoring to lug the struggling brute back with the strength of one arm, while with the other he slashed aimlessly. The tentacles of a second gray mass had entangled themselves with the struggle, and this second gray mass came to its moorings, and slowly sank.

The master set his teeth, gripped his bridle, lowered his head, and spurred his horse forward. The horse on the ground rolled over, there were blood and moving shapes upon the flanks, and the gaunt man, suddenly leaving it, ran forward towards his master, perhaps ten paces. His legs were swathed and encumbered with gray; he made ineffectual movements with his sword. Gray streamers waved from him; there was a thin veil of gray across his face. With his left hand he beat at something on his body, and suddenly he stumbled and fell. He struggled to rise, and fell again, and suddenly, horribly, began to howl. "Oh—ohooh, ohooh!"

The master could see the great spiders upon him, and others upon the ground.

As he strove to force his horse nearer to this gesticulating, screaming gray object that struggled up and down, there came a clatter of hoofs, and the little man, in act of mounting, swordless, balanced on his belly athwart the white horse, and clutching its mane, whirled past. And again a clinging thread of gray gossamer swept across the master's face. All about him, and over him, it seemed this drifting, noiseless cobweb circled and drew nearer him. . . .

To the day of his death he never knew just how the event of that moment happened. Did he, indeed, turn his horse, or did it really of its own accord stampede after its fellow? Suffice it that in another second he was galloping full tilt down the valley with his sword whirling furiously overhead. And all about him on the quickening breeze, the spiders' airships, their air bundles and air sheets, seemed to him to hurry in a conscious pursuit.

Clatter, clatter, thud, thud—the man with the silver bridle rode, heedless of his direction, with his fearful face looking up now right, now left, and his sword arm ready to slash. And a few hundred yards ahead of

him, with a tail of torn cobweb trailing behind him, rode the little man on the white horse, still but imperfectly in the saddle. The reeds bent before them, the wind blew fresh and strong, over his shoulder the master could see the webs hurrying to overtake. . . .

He was so intent to escape the spiders' webs that only as his horse gathered together for a leap did he realize the ravine ahead. And then he realized it only to misunderstand and interfere. He was leaning forward on his horse's neck and sat up and back all too late.

But if in his excitement he had failed to leap, at any rate he had not forgotten how to fall. He was horseman again in mid-air. He came off clear with a mere bruise upon his shoulder, and his horse rolled, kicking spasmodic legs, and lay still. But the master's sword drove its point into the hard soil, and snapped clean across, as though Chance refused him any longer as her knight, and the splintered end missed his face by an inch or so.

He was on his feet in a moment, breathlessly scanning the onrushing spider-webs. For a moment he was minded to run, and then thought of the ravine, and turned back. He ran aside once to dodge one drifting terror, and then he was swiftly clambering down the precipitous sides, and out of the touch of the gale.

There under the lee of the dry torrent's steeper banks he might crouch, and watch these strange, gray masses pass and pass in safety till the wind fell, and it became possible to escape. And there for a long time he crouched, watching the strange, gray, ragged masses trail their streamers across his narrowed sky.

Once a stray spider fell into the ravine close beside him—a full foot it measured from leg to leg, and its body was half a man's hand—and after he had watched its monstrous alacrity of search and escape for a little while, and tempted it to bite his broken sword, he lifted up his iron-heeled boot and smashed it into a pulp. He swore as he did so, and for a time sought up and down for another.

Then presently, when he was surer these spider swarms could not drop into the ravine, he found a place where he could sit down, and sat and fell into deep thought and began after his manner to gnaw his knuckle and bite his nails. And from this he was moved by the coming of the man with the white horse.

He heard him long before he saw him, as a clattering of hoofs, stumbling footsteps, and a reassuring voice. Then the little man appeared, a rueful figure, still with a tail of white cobweb trailing behind him. They approached each other without speaking, without a salutation. The little man was fatigued and shamed to the pitch of hopeless bitterness, and came to a stop at last, face to face with his seated master. The latter winced a little under his dependent's eyes. "Well?" he said at last, with no pretense of authority.

"You left him?"

"My horse bolted."

"I know. So did mine."

He laughed at his master mirthlessly.

"I say my horse bolted," said the man who once had a silver-studded bridle.

"Cowards both," said the little man.

The other gnawed his knuckle through some meditative moments, with his eye on his inferior.

"Don't call me a coward," he said at length.

"You are a coward like myself."

"A coward possibly. There is a limit beyond which every man must fear. That I have learnt at last. But not like yourself. That is where the difference comes in."

"I never could have dreamt you would have left him. He saved your life two minutes before. . . . . Why are you our lord?"

The master gnawed his knuckles again, and his countenance was dark.

"No man calls me a coward," he said. "No . . . A broken sword is better than none. . . . One spavined white horse can not be expected to carry two men a four days' journey. I hate white horses, but this time it can not be helped. You begin to understand me? . . . I perceive that you are minded, on the strength of what you have seen and fancy, to taint my reputation. It is men of your sort who unmake kings. Besides which—I never liked you."

"My lord!" said the little man.

"No," said the master. *"No!"*

He stood up sharply as the little man moved. For a minute perhaps they faced one another. Overhead the spiders' balls went driving. There was a quick movement among the pebbles; a running of feet, a cry of despair, a gasp and a blow. . .

TOWARDS nightfall the wind fell. The sun set in a calm serenity, and the man who had once possessed the silver bridle came at last very cautiously and by an easy slope out of the ravine again; but now he led the white horse that once belonged to the little man. He would have gone back to his horse to get his silver-mounted bridle again, but he feared night and a quickening breeze might still find him in the valley, and besides he disliked greatly to think he might discover his horse all swathed in cobwebs and perhaps unpleasantly eaten.

And as he thought of those cobwebs and of all the dangers he had been through, and the manner in which he had been preserved that day, his hand sought a little reliquary that hung about his neck, and he clasped it for a moment with heartfelt gratitude. As he did so his eyes went across the valley.

"I was hot with passion," he said, "and now she has met her reward. They also, no doubt—"

And behold! Far away out of the wooded slopes across the valley, but in the clearness of the sunset distinct and unmistakable, he saw a little spire of smoke.

At that his expression of serene resignation changed to an amazed anger. Smoke! He turned the head of the white horse about, and hesitated. And as he did so a little rustle of air went through the grass about him. Far away upon some reeds swayed a tattered sheet of gray. He looked at the cobwebs; he looked at the smoke.

"Perhaps, after all, it is not them," he said at last.

But he knew better.

After he had stared at the smoke for some time, he mounted the white horse.

As he rode, he picked his way amidst stranded masses of web. For some reason there were many dead spiders on the ground, and those that lived feasted guiltily on their fellows. At the sound of his horse's hoofs they fled.

Their time had passed. From the ground without either a wind to carry them or a winding sheet ready, these things, for all their poison, could do him little evil.

He flicked with his belt at those he fancied came too near. Once, where a number ran together over a bare place, he was minded to dismount and trample them with his boots, but this impulse he overcame. Ever and again he turned in his saddle, and looked back at the smoke.

"Spiders," he muttered over and over again. "Spiders! Well, well. . . . The next time I must spin a web."

Sir Rupert's Treasure

A Ghost Story of Bonny Scotland

By JAMES COCKS

THE sun had set. Gradually the darkness of the evening settled like a pall over the hills of bonny Scotland, and the silence that followed was almost painful. Along the darkening way passed a lone horseman urging forward his nag toward a night's shelter.

Suddenly out of the silence came the low roll of distant thunder. There followed a silence more painful than before, then flashes of lightning played across the sky, and the rumble and roar of the storm came on. Nearer and nearer it came, gaining in volume, until with a tremendous crash it broke about the defenseless head of the wayfarer, and he involuntarily ducked to dodge its full force. The lightning flashed about him: Sizz! Crack! Boom!

The belated one, an English traveler, shuddered and bent low over his horse's neck as she stood still trembling, and encouragingly said to her, "Steady, my good Bess." The thunder roared still louder, and the lightning flashes were almost continuous until it seemed as if the crack of doom were upon them. Down came the hail and rain in torrents. The horse shivered and neighed. "Yes, my good Bess, it is a terrible night. I wish that you were in your stall with a good feed of oats and a warm bed of straw, and I by the fireside of a good hostelry with my pipe and a hot glass of grog. Ugh! this is terrible. I would pity a dog out on such a night as this. My good Bess, we must find shelter or we shall perish. Onward. Bess, onward!" Then he muttered to himself, "Fool, fool that I was to take such a trip! No one but a doddering idiot would undertake such a fool piece of business as this. Ugh!" Then, speaking again to his horse, he said, "Cheer up, Bess, old girl, shelter must be somewhere near."

As the rain continued to fall in torrents he soliloquized, "I am a bigger fool than my father, and he was a much bigger fool than his father. Here we have a direct chain of idiocy. Its first link, my grandfather, a fool, and its last link, myself, a *damn* fool. My, what a night! Let me see, how does that legacy read? Ugh! how the hailstones bite! First find the black round stone. In its center is a small drilled hole into which insert a knitting needle. Let the needle stand out three inches, and at the exact hour of noon mark line of shadow to its point A. From point A at an angle of ninety degrees to the east and 1,000 feet away is point B, thence at an angle of ninety degrees south 1,000 feet is point C, thence forty-five degrees West 500 feet is point D. Provide a flat surface here and insert needle at 10:30 a. m. and mark line of shadow 475 feet to point E. Beneath lies Sir Rupert's treasure!—Ugh!—Yes. I've no doubt this is true. But what of it?—Ugh! this is too much!—Damn Sir Rupert's treasure! I have had enough of it. I am through with the whole thing now and forever. I shall—Ah! what is that? A light! Ah! my good Bess, as sure as thunder, I see a light. Onward, Bess, onward! A good feed of oats and a warm bed of straw is waiting."

It was indeed a sorry sight that drew up at the hostelry, a wayside tavern. Mine host said to the bedraggled and half frozen English traveler, "I am sorry, sir, I can not let you have a room. On account of the storm my inn is filled with guests. I will provide well for your mare. She shall have a hot mash, rub-down, and a good bed of straw. But, sir, you are welcome to the shelter of my roof. A splendid fire is burning and the kettle is boiling, and my toddy can't be beaten."

The traveler was provided with a change of clothing, and after a few toddies by the warm fire, he was himself again. During a lull in the business mine host came and sat by his side and said, "Sir, I have done my best. Your horse is comfortable and enjoying her feed, and I hope you are comfortable too, sir."

He replied, "Mine host, I am indeed grateful for your good cheer. This is a veritable heaven compared with those hills on such a night as this. I spent two hours in that storm, and I don't know what would have become of me if I had not seen your welcome light. I can assure you it was a good sight for weary eyes. But, my dear host, I am terribly sleepy. Could you find some corner where I could snatch a few hours of sleep?"

"My dear sir," replied mine host, "it is impossible. You can see for yourself that I am crowded with guests. Every inch of available space is occupied, but,—ah!"

"But ah what, sir?" asked the Englishman eagerly.

"Well, sir," replied mine host, "it is this way. This tavern, like every old building in these parts, has its legend and its ghost, and we all believe it more or less. My family has lived in this tavern for three generations. My grandfather built this tavern. He occupied one room to the day of his death. Just before he died he vowed he would occupy the room when dead, as he had when living. He made my father promise to keep the room in order and cozy, and he did so to the day of his death. My father exacted the same promise from me, and I have respected his wishes, sir. I have kept the room well aired and cozy. This room, with the others, is fixed up every morning. It has never been entered after dark since my grandfather's death, and you haven't money enough, sir, to hire anyone around these parts to go into that room at night. It has never been offered to a guest. Now, sir, I am willing to break a rule that three generations have observed. If you are not afraid of my grandfather's ghost, I will let you have the room."

The Englishman sprang to his feet, exclaiming joyously, "Ah, my good host! That is splendid of you, I am sure. So far as the ghost is concerned, it's all humbug, sir, all humbug. Why, I am known among all my friends as a confounded atheist, you know, and a believer in nothing. If you will provide me with a bottle of gin and a kettle of hot water, I can assure you I shall have a pleasant time, and should your grandfather condescend to share the room with me, I shall be only too happy to entertain him, I am sure."

"All right, sir," responded mine host, "I will make up the fire at once, and I hope you will have a pleasant night. Don't hesitate to ring, if you are disturbed and need me."

"Thank you," he replied; "just leave the key on the inside so I can lock out the living, you know."

In a little while the guest was comfortably seated in an easy chair in front of a cheerful fire with a smoking hot toddy by his side. As he smoked his fragrant cigar, a smile of satisfaction spread over his face, and he thought of his trusty mare crunching her supper and stamping her

hoofs with satisfaction in her stall of clean straw. He prided himself on his infidelity and unbelief in anything supernatural. He claimed to be an atheist, and perhaps he was.

As he sat by the glowing fire and sipped his toddy he began to feel very happy. "Ah!" he sighed; "life is very beautiful and complete after all. What could I wish for more? I am sure of three good meals a day, all the toddy I need, and a pleasant smoke whenever I wish."

A hazy, happy, dreamy feeling was stealing over him. A far-off look came into his eyes and his lips formed into a pleasant smile. He was no longer in a haunted chamber in bonny Scotland. With the swiftness of thought he had crossed the ocean, and was in New York, and about to listen to his favorite speaker, that famous agnostic, Robert G. Ingersoll. He was about to hear again that great lecture, "What must I do to be saved?" As the speaker stood up he clapped his hands with the rest of the audience. Then, while he sat fascinated, breathlessly waiting for him to begin, his right hand moved slowly toward the table and grasped the glass of toddy, bringing it to his lips. Still he kept his eyes centered on the speaker. He heaved an unconscious sigh of pleasure as the toddy reached his reservoir of satisfaction. Yet he missed not a move of the lecturer. His lips resumed their smile as he heard the thrilling voice of the speaker saying, "Ladies and gentlemen. . . ."

With his eyes glued on the speaker, his right hand again reached forth for the glass of toddy. It was on the very edge of the table, and as his hand touched it lightly, it toppled over and fell to the floor with a crash. Instantly the vision vanished. He sprang to his feet with a gasp of fright as he said, "Well I'll be——." Then he smiled, mixed another glass of toddy, resumed his seat before the fire, and blowing clouds of smoke about him again soliloquized. "Well, 'pon my word, if I didn't forget all about the blamed ghost! For a few minutes I really thought I was in New York. Really, I believe I jumped out of three weeks' growth. Oh, and mine host believes there's a blooming ghost bobbing about this room. Oh, say! This ghost business pains me, you know.

"If you ask me, I'd like to know how the devil can a ghost come back, if he wants to. That's the idea. That's the question. How could he come back if he wanted to?

"When he was alive and kicking, eighty per cent of his body was water. Hold up there, my boy, you are wasting valuable time. Don't forget the toddy. Yes, it's real fine. Every blooming glass tastes better than the one before.

"Let me see. Oh, yes. Eighty per cent of his body is water. That's gases. So, eighty per cent of my dear Mr. Grandfather's ghost is gases—oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen—you know. The other twenty per cent—the residuum—is gone back into earth and made first-class fertilizer, and probably gone into cabbages and turnips long ago. Now, Mr. Ghost, I want to ask you a question. How are you going to show yourself? You haven't any residuum to hold yourself together. I know bally well you can get the gases. That's eighty per cent of you. But you can't get the residuum. That's where you are stuck, my boy. Well, here's to you, Mr. Ghost. 'Pon my word, I wish you could join me. This is excellent toddy.

"Now, friend ghost, if I had some of my laboratory tools here, and you should pay me a visit, I would put you in a vessel and flash a little current through you and bally well turn you into water. Then I would take a drink of this excellent Old Tom gin and drink you for a chaser. Ah, friend ghost, I would blooming well

drink you for a chaser. But you can't come back. You haven't any residuum. You can't do it, you know. Now I am going to make another drink, and then sleep, you know."

He undressed, drank his toddy, crawled into bed, and made himself comfortable for the night. For a few minutes he thought of Sir Rupert's treasure, then mumbled. "Insert a knitting needle in the drilled hole and let it stand out three inches. At 12 o'clock mark the line of the shadow to point A, then at an angle of ninety degrees measure one thousand—one thousand—one thous——." A snore He was asleep.

WHILE the Englishman was enjoying himself in his room, there was quite some bustle below. They had run out of meat and bread in the kitchen, and a man was busy in the barn dressing a sheep, while the good wife was making a large sponge, for she must bake a good batch of bread the first thing in the morning. When finally her sponge was made and covered with a cloth to keep it warm for the night, the tavern had become quiet, for all were asleep.

The Englishman had not slept long before he felt a slight chill running down his back. He moved uneasily and then awoke with a start. "Suffering Moses," he gasped, as he beheld, standing at the foot of his bed, a ghost, austere, cold, silent. "What a fool imagination I've got!" he mumbled. "Ghost be damned! All poppycock, you know." He then turned over with his face to the wall, and in another moment was soundly sleeping again.

In a little while, however, he again felt chilled, and awoke exclaiming impatiently, "What in the blooming—eh—what's that?" There at the foot of his bed stood the ghost as before, quietly, coldly, surveying him.

"That fool ghost yarn is certainly playing on my imagination," he said, and then to the ghost he remarked, "But you can't do it, you know. You haven't any residuum. Good night." Then, closing his eyes to the disturbing sight, he was soon snoring in genuine sleep.

But it was not for long that he was permitted to rest. Suddenly startled, he sat up straight in bed, exclaiming, "Hello, hello! What's the blooming row?" Then for a moment his face blanched and his hair bristled. There stood Mr. Ghost. The Englishman's cold-blooded scientific reasoning came to his assistance at once, and he exclaimed in astonishment, "Why, old top, how in the devil did you manage it? Where did you get the residuum, you know? Wait a minute, old top, we've got to think it over a bit." Then he soliloquized, "This is no dream, and the blooming thing was real each time. I can't understand it. I've studied Voltaire, read Tom Paine, and listened to Ingersoll, and come to the conclusion that I was a blooming atheist. Then here comes this old top and knocks the whole shooting match higher than a kite. Well, I'll be blowed."

Then he addressed the ghost and said, "Who are you?" The ghost replied, "I am thy grandsire, Sir Rupert!"

"The devil you are!" said he. "I thought you were the old chap that built this house. Well, what about it?"

"Follow me," came the reply.

"Yes, but wait a bit, you know—"

"Follow me," came impatiently from the ghost.

"All right, old chap. Don't get your back up!"

He then got out of bed and lit the candle, and followed Sir Rupert's ghost slowly down the stairs, through the hallway and kitchen, and out into the back yard. This back yard was large and covered with many flagstones. Sir Rupert's ghost stood on

the center of one, and said: *"Beneath me lies the treasure!"*

A gust of wind blew out the candle. In the darkness the Englishman said: "Say, Sir Rupert, how in the devil shall I know the spot?"

Sir Rupert's ghost answered, "In yonder kitchen stands a bowl of sponge. Mark well the spot with it."

The Englishman hastened to the kitchen, took up the large bowl of sponge, and turned it upside down on the flagstone on which Sir Rupert stood, remarking: "There you are, Sir Rupert; the sponge will stick to the stone, and the blooming bowl will stick to the sponge."

The ghost replied, "It is well!" and disappeared.

The tired Englishman went back to his bed, to snatch a little sleep while yet it was night. After some time of peaceful slumber, he dreamed that some soft jellylike monster was enveloping his entire person, sucking the life blood from every pore of his flesh. He felt its nauseous clammy touch crawling over his legs—they were glued within its grip. It crawled up his legs, and over his abdomen he felt its sickening clasp. Then it enveloped his arms and glued them to his sides, and slowly it encircled his throat. Every nerve of his body was strained to free himself from its sickening grip. Now he was gasping for breath. The thing was about to enclose his mouth and smother him. With a yell of horror, he sprang from his bed. A thousand gluey sticky strings held him to the bed clothes.

"Great jumping Jehoshaphat, what is this?" he exclaimed. He was covered from head to foot with sticky, spongy dough.

"Blimey," he said. "If that cussed ghost business ain't nothing but a dream,—and I've been walking in my sleep again—damn!"

At this moment a voice rang out from below, *"Someone has stolen my batch of dough!"*

In the January WEIRD TALES—

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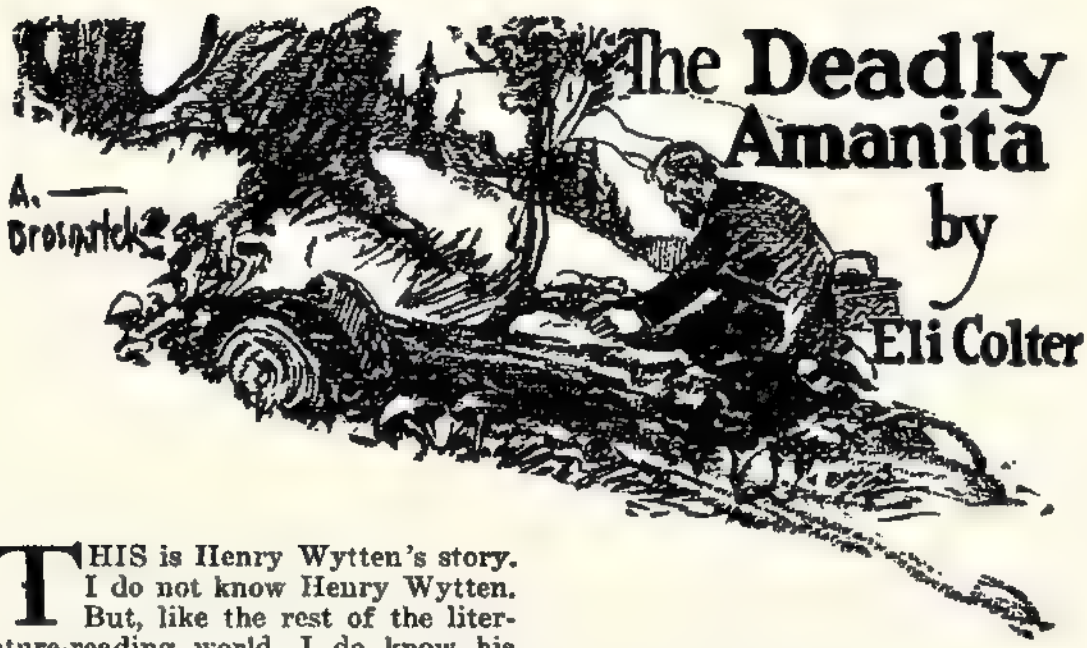

The Deadly Amanita

by Eli Colter

THIS is Henry Wytten's story. I do not know Henry Wytten. But, like the rest of the literature-reading world, I do know his works. His name is a household word. His photograph in some characteristic pose dominates every dilettante's art collection of the literati. But for the purpose of preserving an incognito one name is as good as another. Henry Wytten. . . .

The pseudonym was created by Hugh Blondin. Last summer during his vacation, Blondin made a trip to Los Angeles and we happened to meet on the street. Delighted at the unexpected pleasure of seeing him again I insisted that he accompany me to the newly opened Biltmore to luncheon.

When we had ensconced ourselves by a window table I noticed among the entrées a favorite dish of his—kidney sauté. Remembering his fondness for mushrooms I suggested the dish, and he heartily commended the choice. Then he looked at me with the sudden gleam of inspiration in his eye.

"Didn't I hear you say you were out here looking for a story?"

"You did," I nodded. "But with restrictions and conditions. It must be a story with a lift—and with a kick. Also it must be the real life story of a real man—I have a commission. And such stories aren't hanging around on the palm trees."

"I think not," he agreed. "But I can give you one. A rattling good story, too. Provided you promise not to reveal the identity of anyone concerned in it. Myself included."

"Done on the spot."

But what was Blondin doing with a rattling good story up his sleeve? I appreciated his generosity, but I was instantly alert for the nigger in the woodpile. Why didn't he write it up himself if it were of such excellence? There must be a catch somewhere. However, I refrained from voicing any such thought, drew an envelope from my pocket, slit it and lined off the back of it for shorthand notes.

"Lay on, McDuff, we're all set," I said.

And this is the story Blondin told.

WELL, fifteen years ago Madden wrote me for a story. It also had to be a story with such restrictions and conditions as you name—the real life story of a real man. Quite a coincidence, eh?

Madden was before your time, so I might mention that he was the editorial genius of that period, and a consignment from him was considered a complimentary ticket to the hall of fame. Of course I was wildly excited over my long-waited-for opportunity, and began casting about in my mind for a suitable man to approach. Several interested friends offered inadequate suggestions. I tried one or two, but either their lives were unthrillingly dull, or they objected to having their intimate histories made the basis of a story. I was beginning to despair when I recollected a chum of old acquaintance who had been condemned with T. B. Hoping to dodge the undertaker with the aid of fresh air and a tomato patch, he had gone off to rough it in the hills. I took the next train for his hill valley with high hopes.

Arriving there I told him immediately of the object of my trip. The poor chap raked his memory obligingly. But either he had nothing of value to give me, or I had grown unwontedly meticulous under the importance of the occasion. The morning after my arrival I was seated on an overturned tomato crate in his garden, watching him pick and sort the choice specimens of his small crop, when he suddenly paused in his work with the air of having hit upon the very thing I sought.

"I've got it, Hugh. Go up and see the hermit! I'll bet a house he's got a story—if you can make him talk. Nobody else has ever been able to pry a word out of him."

"The hermit? Sounds good," I answered politely, but morosely unimpressed. At the word "hermit" a picture had instantly presented itself to my mind. Some long, lean hillbilly. Lantern jaws covered with scraggly whiskers. Little, black, shifty, beady eyes. Endless chews of plug cut. An unwashed, odoriferous person. I'd seen hermits before. But merely for the purpose of furthering conversation, I asked: "Why won't he talk?"

"How should I know?" My friend was both amused and surprized at my question. "I don't suppose hermits ever talk, do they?"

"On the contrary, the most loquacious man I ever knew was a so called hermit," I assured him. I had, you will see, become thoroughly pessimistic. "Men give various reasons for avoiding contact with the world, but they are all actuated by the same fundamental impulse. They're failures. All they can do is ride their grouches interminably to whosoever will listen. I wouldn't walk across the street to interview a hermit! Where does this one keep himself?"

"Up yonder, at the edge of that bare patch on Old Baldy. You may be right about hermits in general, Hugh, but I tell you there is something unusual about this fellow." My friend laid a huge red tomato in the crate he was filling, and there was a slight puzzled frown on his forehead as he answered me.

I sat up on my perch with a glimmering of interest to survey the spot he indicated. A high mountain loomed over the nearer foothills, thickly wooded save for an oddly flat bald space on the summit. Old Baldy. Well, I was certain of one thing. A man who chose to live at the timber line on an obscure mountain top the year round was sincere in his desire to isolate himself! He must spend most of the summer storing up fuel and provisions against the winter when he would be snowed in.

"What's unusual about him?" I asked. My interest was increasing rapidly. As I said, I'd seen hermits before—a number of 'em. But none buried alive at the timber line! I couldn't afford to neglect a clue.

wild or otherwise, that might lead to a story.

"Oh, I hardly know." My friend glanced up at the mountain, his brows still wrinkled in perplexity. "A few adventurous fellows have run him down, and rumor has it that he always says 'Howdy' and invites them in to dinner. I fancy it's his way of getting rid of them. They always vamoose at that, their curiosity satisfied, having found nothing romantic or mysterious in just an ordinary man in an ordinary cabin living a step aside from the beaten track. But I have an idea he's a strange old cuss."

Just an ordinary man in an ordinary cabin living—at the timber line. Imagine! I rose to go into the house for my mackinaw and hiking boots, asking: "How do you get there?"

My friend grinned. "Oh, you've decided to go, have you? Well, it's a bit farther than across the street—about four or five miles farther," he answered dryly. Then his face sobered and he went on with enthusiasm. "I believe it's worth looking into, anyhow. You go up over Larch Trail. It's not traveled very much and you'll find it heavy going. Better not tackle it today. Wait till tomorrow and get an early start."

"That's hardly necessary," I told him, taking a quick glance at the sun. It wasn't more than 10 o'clock, and at that time of year it doesn't get dark till 8 or 9 in the evening. My muscles were rather well trail-seasoned then, and I knew I could make four or five miles easily, and have an hour or so with the hermit, and get back before night. I explained my thoughts on the subject and he answered: "Well, go to it, old son. I hope your trip isn't for nothing."

I told him if it was I'd have him drawn, quartered and boiled in oil: then I made for the house.

Half an hour later I was well on my way to Larch Trail. I found it pleasant traveling until I reached the base of Old Baldy, and struck into the trail. There I came to the real labor of climbing, and it developed into mighty nasty going. The trail ran circuitously up the mountain through heavy forest and rank underbrush. There was a good deal of clay in the soil, and the path itself, though clearly enough defined to be followed easily, was mucky and slippery.

I traveled as swiftly as I could, but to my dismay my friend's four or five miles lengthened into seven or eight, and it was early evening before I reached the timber line, where at the edge of the bald space the trail turned sharply to the right. I stopped abruptly and stared at the scene before me. It stamped itself indelibly upon my mind. Now, after fifteen years, it's as clear as though it were something I had seen but yesterday.

Flanked on both sides by the stunted timber indigenous to that altitude, unpainted and weathered a deep gray, facing a small cleared space, stood a log cabin. Directly in front of it was a garden outlined with small whitewashed stones, a garden of flowers brilliant in color and profuse in bloom. I don't know exactly what I *had* expected, you understand; some sort of eccentric squalor, I think. But certainly I hadn't expected a flower garden! And the cabin itself—it had a queer dignity, a kind of architectural individuality that gave me the impression of having found a soul where I had thought to find a skeleton.

I walked up to the door and gave the old iron knocker a single sharp rap, keenly conscious, as I did so, of the atmosphere of the place. As though my knock were a signal which someone within had been expecting, the door swung instantly

open, a man appeared on the threshold, and a gentle courteous voice said, "Howdy."

I made a mental note that so far rumor was right, as I turned my eyes full on the hermit of Old Baldy. I realized instantly that there were potent possibilities in the man. He was of a most unusual type. You've seen his picture—but he's changed greatly. At that time he was thin, almost to emaciation. He combed his long white hair straight back as he does now. But it was from his face that I got my impression. I knew it for the face of a man with inhibitions and banked desires. A face that wore a mask of quiet dignity, challenging vandal eyes. And out of his own long, green-gray eyes the very spirit of the man seemed to look forth valiantly—almost defiantly.

I guess I'm getting muddled, but I find it hard to describe my exact impression. Above everything else I felt certain he had weathered some fiery ordeal which had burned away grossness, leaving the inner light shining clear. But there was something beyond even that, which I can find no words for. Oh, hang it!—when you get home dig out his picture and look—you'll see what I mean. It declared him for the man he was, warned me of the utter futility of dissembling. He had my number instantly. I knew it, and he knew that I knew it. So, having sensed that frankness was the only policy which would get me anywhere, I adopted it off the bat.

"My friend," I said, taking off my hat and leaning one hand against the door casing, "I hiked all the way up Larch Trail just to see if I couldn't persuade you to tell me your story. My name's Blondin. I'm an author—up against it for a plot. Every man's got a story, and I figured yours might be worth while."

Gad! It must have sounded cocky! I'd just landed in some of the biggest magazines and I was feeling my oats. But he saw past the sheer presumption of youth, and smiled.

Yet, even as he smiled, there was a queer flash in his strange eyes. What was it? Disappointment?—Delight?—Eagerness? For the life of me, I couldn't tell. I concluded it was a blend of all three with eagerness predominating. But it died out so quickly that I couldn't be sure.

Then he spoke, casually, courteously: "Cards on the table, eh? That is probably the first entirely truthful statement any of my visitors has ever made to me. Most of them had stopped to rest—tired—lost their way—one even had the trite idiocy to sprain his ankle. Any old alibi. Perhaps that is why your candor appeals to me. Won't you come in, Mr. Blondin?"

"Thanks, I was hoping you'd ask me," I answered. Sticking to my policy, you see.

But I tell you, the moment my eyes took in the big cabin's interior, I momentarily forgot the hermit and my interest was transferred to his dwelling place. It was a living room we had entered, lighted by two big shaded lamps, one on each hand. Although he had drawn the shades to keep out the half light of evening, the soft glow of the lamps gave the impression of the setting sun shining through the windows. The entire room was ceiled with myrtle wood of exquisite grain. On the wall facing me was a great colored reproduction of Sir Alfred East's *Lonely Road*. To the right was a myrtle-wood bookcase filled with volumes of poetry. Every man who ever sat on Olympus and communed with Calliope was there; from Homer to Kipling—from Omar to Masefield.

Oddly enough, the only coherent thought that penetrated my dum-

founded senses was the remark made by my tomato fancier friend: "An ordinary man in an ordinary cabin" . . .

"But," I said, feeling a kind of helplessness, "I don't see how those others who came up here curiosity-seeking ever went down again and remained silent about what they had seen!"

"Bless your heart, man!" The hermit ran a caressing hand over his books: "They didn't know what they had seen." There was irony in his voice, and a shade of contempt.

I was recovering from my first shock of surprize, and my attention veered to the hermit as I remembered what had brought me up Larch Trail. I asked him rather bluntly what manner of man he was, but he shook his head, smiling and saying: "That, Mr. Blondin, is a part of the story."

I took a step toward him, hot on the scent. "Well—do I get it?" I said.

At my question the queer flash again lit his eyes. And again it was hidden quickly, but this time I was certain that the predominant quality of it was eagerness. He motioned me to a seat and began to speak in a slow, careful manner; a manner which gave me the uncomfortable feeling that he was veiling some deep, important purpose, with a casual exterior through which I could see only too easily.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Blondin. You've been candid with me. Very well. I'll return the courtesy. I didn't isolate myself for the sole purpose of avoiding my fellow men. I get lonely. But that again is part of the story. Very well. I'll make you a proposition. If you will stay and have dinner with me, give me the pleasure of your company for the night and at breakfast, I will tell you all there is to tell before you go down the mountain."

There it was. I could take it or leave it. But I didn't like that look in his eye. I knew that for a reason known only to himself, my unexpected appearance was of some secret and prodigious import to him. I knew, as he stood there almost breathlessly waiting my answer, that my staying was of even greater import and that he desired it enormously. I sat there looking him in the eye, trying to come to a decision.

Why should he be so palpably anxious for a guest overnight? If he craved companionship, then why didn't he get off that mountain top and live like a civilized human being? And if it were merely a passing impulse engendered by chance contact with a man from his own obvious stratum, why mask it under a tone too casual, a manner too guarded?

My first impelling inclination was to refuse his offer, though I didn't like the idea of going down that tricky trail in the dark. Yet I felt it useless to stay. I had a distinct sense of foreboding, a prescience, in spite of his promise, that I would never take his story down the mountain. Maybe the man was merely a clever maniac; how could I know? But the thought of crusty, courted Madden, and the chance of pleasing that difficultly-approached editor decided me. I said to myself: what the deuce—I came after a story!

"I'll just take you up on that," I said, rising to my feet and holding out a hand. "And thanks for your hospitality. Also, let's eat, pronto. What do you say? I brought nothing but a couple of sandwiches with me, which I ate half-way up the trail, and I find I've developed quite an appetite."

He took my hand in a firm grip, a grip with the right stuff behind it, but that infernal eagerness flashed for a moment beyond all control, and

he couldn't quite suppress a sigh of relief as he murmured a courteous pleasure at my decision and turned to lead the way into the kitchen.

Lighting a lamp in a brass bracket on the wall, he turned to the window, where there was a deep white-granite pan covered with a clean blue cloth. I'd noticed that the whole place was clean as a whistle.

Lifting the cloth, he asked me: "Do you like mushrooms?"

And I saw that the pan was filled to the brim with mushrooms of all colors, shapes and sizes. I was used only to the common white mushroom of the city markets at that time, and I felt an involuntary start of repulsion. Some of these were really beautiful. But most of them presented an ugly, slimy, even deadly appearance.

"Good Lord!" I said, bending over the dish for a closer inspection. "Are those things fit to eat?"

He nodded emphatically. "They certainly are. See this?"

He held up a mushroom perhaps three inches across the top, somewhat concave in the center, and the orange-yellow of a carrot. Pretty enough, oh, yes! But it had been bruised here and there, and the abrasions had turned a dull, dirty green. He turned it over in his fingers, explaining:

"This is the *Orange Milk Lactor.*" Taking a sharp paring knife from the table he cut the top across. Instantly a milky red fluid oozed from the severed edges. He rubbed it with his finger and the stain lay across his flesh like blood. "This juice makes the *Lactor* very rich, probably the most delicious species that grows. And this *Boletus.* Isn't it a beauty?" He held up a large heavy-stemmed specimen with white base, yellow tubes and a round, brilliant crimson top.

"That's a matter of individual taste," I answered. "Frankly—it may be a beauty, as you say, but I shouldn't consider it an enticing edible. Where do you get those weird things?"

"Down below the timber line under the pines." The hermit smiled as he went on with his explanations. "This small slimy brown one is the *Bermuda Boletus.* Of course, there are many poisonous species, but if you know your fungi—you're safe. And I know them."

He lifted the pan to the table, and began to clean and slice the heterogeneous collection without regard to size, coloring or shape. And as he continued his voluble description of each one, his sudden garrulity seemed to me more deliberately significant than incidental. *I realized that he was trying to impress me with his expert knowledge of mushrooms.* And to what end? I've always been a touchy cuss, and I couldn't help a feeling of slight uneasiness.

He worked swiftly, and in an incredibly short space of time had laid on the table a steaming and inviting dinner, of which the *pièce de resistance* was jerked venison and mushrooms.

As I seated myself to the excellent meal, resolving to enjoy it to the full, I saw once again that flash of eagerness in his eyes. And as I ate, with great appreciation of his culinary skill, I was analyzing the situation I had found in that cabin. It wasn't in the book that a hermit should prove to be a man of refinement and culture. It wasn't in the book that a log cabin on a mountain top should contain the East hung on polished myrtle walls and the poets of all time bound in limp leather. It wasn't in the book, either, that his cordial reception should be born of an ulterior motive—but I hadn't yet decided

whether or not the man were sane. Many a dangerous maniac's aberration shows only in his eyes.

Finishing my dinner, I drew out my cigar case and offered him a smoke, with the remark, "That's the best meal I have ever eaten, without any exaggeration." As he accepted the Havana I glanced casually into his face. You know how sensitive I am to atmosphere. Something chilling and arresting flashed over me. That confounded eagerness again! I said, rather bluntly, I fear: "You're a strange character, my friend. Don't fail to shoot square with me!"

He answered evenly: "I always shoot square. Can you believe that? Very well."

The eagerness seemed to sink back into some hidden recess of his thought, and I, searching the green-gray eyes, found the pupils suddenly opaque, and felt queerly baffled.

He went on softly: "I never failed to shoot square but once in my life, and thereby hangs—this cabin on Old Baldy. But I'll tell you in the morning." Then he shut his lips tightly, as though he had said too much.

My uneasiness rose again. What was the man up to? What would I find in the morning? An empty cabin from which my bird had flown? Locked jaws which had never intended to speak? Would there *be* any morning for me? My nerves were knocked into a cocked hat and I was ready to imagine anything.

It was such an unprecedented experience, you understand. And I was young, and impressionable to a painful degree. Tired from the long hike up the mountain, too. Then the man's culture and exquisite tastes displayed in his house were so unlooked for. And his manner—and that infernal eagerness! My brain was in a mess—all I could do was stick it out and see what came of it. But that one thing in my mind kept growing to an uncomfortable certainty: I'd never take his story to Madden. I mentally kicked myself for an ass, but I couldn't get away from that impression.

I got to my feet abruptly and said to him: "I'd like to turn in, if you don't mind. I'm tired." It was rude and boorish, but I couldn't help it. He said, "Certainly," rose quickly and pushed open the bedroom door.

"I suppose you are done up," he went on by way of leaving me to my sleep. "Larch Trail is a bad one. Will you have the lamp?" I told him no, there was a little light through the windows. He answered my shortness with his unfailing courtesy and stood aside as I passed into the room, where in the dim light I could see a magnificent walnut bed standing by the wall. As he closed the door he added almost heartily, "Good night, Mr. Blondin. I hope you sleep well."

I got into bed quickly, but with no intention of sleeping. I had fully decided to remain awake all night. I listened for some sound from the other rooms, but there was none. I could see the light shining through a crevice under the door, and finally I got out of the covers and looked through the keyhole. Much good it did me! He was not in my line of vision, I couldn't see a thing but the corner of the bookcase. I lay down again, listening and thinking. Presently I became aware of a light insistent noise to the left just beyond the door. The unmistakable rhythmic swing of a rocking chair, and the rustle of pages turned slowly. But I wasn't at all reassured, and I fought all tendency to drowze. However, my tired body and the mountain air were too much for me.

In spite of myself I lost consciousness, and awoke in what seemed the following instant with the sun shin-

ing full in my face. I heard the hermit in the other room whistling cheerily as he went about getting breakfast. I thought of my apprehensions of the night before and laughed aloud.

Dressing quickly, I opened the door and called out: "Good morning. How's everything?"

The hermit instantly appeared in the kitchen doorway with a pleasant greeting, adding that he was about to call me to breakfast. Yet, in spite of his attempt at cheerfulness his face was drawn and the eagerness had disappeared from his eyes. I knew instinctively he had not slept—that he had been sitting in that rocking chair all night. As he looked at me I sensed about him a sort of hunted air, and I felt a keen impulse of pity. I almost contemplated letting him off, then I decided he hadn't needed to make the bargain if he hadn't wanted to do so, and I went in to breakfast. Not a word was said during the meal. We ate in a strained silence, and after we had finished he abruptly rose and went into the living room, motioning me to follow. Still silent, he stood looking at me, in the center of the room. There was something so downright sad in his eyes that I involuntarily walked up to him and put my hand on his shoulder.

"Well, what about that story?" I said, trying to speak gently, but wanting it over. He flinched, as if from some sudden pain, and I instantly removed my hand, nonplussed.

Without a word he turned to the bookcase and took from it a volume covered with heavy Manila paper. It had been lying on the bottom shelf, which I had not noticed before, upon a stack of loose-leaf files packed to overflowing with papers of some kind. Still silent, he removed the manila wrapper and handed the volume to me. I've seen a like volume in your own library. An excellent example of the bookmaker's art, deep gray, embossed in gold. Across the corner a full-rigged ship sailing with all canvas up, and under it the title:

PASSION AND AIR AND FIRE
By Henry Wytten.

For a moment I was puzzled, couldn't see what he was getting at. Ten years before, that work had flashed across the literary sky like a blazing comet. The critics had hailed Henry Wytten as the genius of the age. Then, like a comet he had disappeared, never to be heard from again, leaving behind that one little book as his sole contribution to immortal literature.

Suddenly I understood, and turned to the hermit in a daze, stammering: "You aren't trying to tell me—you don't mean—you're not—"

"Exactly." He interrupted. "I am the man who was once known as Henry Wytten. Won't you be seated?"

Be seated! And I had found Henry Wytten. *Henry Wytten—Old Baldy—ten years!* . . . Be seated! Good God! I told him no—I must have air. He followed me outside and we came to a halt at last under the pines quite a way down the trail. I turned and faced him then, trembling with the import of my discovery.

"For God's sake, Wytten," I said, "talk!"

He smiled sadly, regretfully. "I'll talk, Mr. Blondin. It can be told in a few words." His voice was tired, let down. "From the days of my earliest memory I have written poetry. It has been my life, my thoughts, my hopes, my dreams. My very soul. But they wanted to kill my soul. Who? My wife—my people.

"My people were hardworking men and women of the lower class. They may have wanted me to grow husky and blossom into a boiler maker; I can't say. Certainly they didn't want me to be a poet. To them that was little above disgrace. When I was a puny child they used to take my beloved poems and burn them. I'd rather they'd beaten me with a knotted rope!

"There's something in the beautiful sound of singing words that meter and rime that fairly intoxicates me. I can't read poetry and stay on earth. It rouses me to ecstasies in which I'm hardly conscious of what I'm doing for hours after. You can see what my own poetry would mean to me? Very well.

"But my people couldn't understand. I realized that, but it didn't deter me. I was too frail for manual labor, unskilled in any trade, uneducated for any profession, and they hadn't the wherewithal to educate me. I got that education myself. My verses didn't sell, however. My father never allowed me to forget that I had never aided in the family expenses; and that was rank heresy to them, something intolerable.

"Life was coming to an unbearable pass for me when a friend of my mother's sent her daughter to visit us. The girl had an unusual amount of beauty. Her people were wealthy, the mother had married a swine of a man who had nothing but money. He had promptly died and left the fortune to her and the girl. The obvious thing happened. My people wanted me to marry the girl. She had romantic ideas; and my poetic ambitions fascinated her even as her physical beauty fascinated me.

"The marriage appeared to me a welcome relief from my stultifying environment. I had a delusion that through love I might find leisure and opportunity to indulge in poetry to my heart's content. So—we were married. But love? I came out of my dreams, post haste! Early after our wedding, Minna—her name was Minna Flett—found that my poems had no market. Love had been the merest pretense with her—she had wanted to display a genius husband. She had counted on my frail health making me submissive to her termagant will. And when she found the world refusing to acclaim me, she let loose all the devils that had been born in her.

"Night and day she lashed me with her tongue. The things some women can think of to say to a man! God forgive her for having married a weakling—I was only a failure living on her money—and many other things beside which such as this pale into insignificance. You—understand? Very well.

"WE HAD been married more than a year when the inharmonious existence we led came to a crisis. I had compiled a volume which had just been rejected for the seventeenth time. With every rejection Minna became more vituperative. This day I mailed the manuscript for the eighteenth time, and had just returned from the errand. I had gotten out all my carbon copies from my files, and all my originals. I was sitting in the library reading them over, polishing, revising; as a jeweler polishes his precious stones, letting them lie in the sun, watching the light scintillate through them, fondling them for very love of them.

"Minna came in the door, watching me for a moment, then began raging at me because she was certain the volume would only be rejected once more. My nerves were on a raw edge. The best of me was in that book. You're an author. You know with what hopes I refined it again and again, and sent it on its way. With what hopes, and dreams, and

sick fears. I couldn't stand her raging. I'd simply reached the end of my endurance. I told her to hush or I'd find some means of compelling her to, and went on with my work, ignoring her outburst. Maddened by my stubbornly maintained silence, she began to taunt me with my inability to attract the attention of a publisher. I set my teeth and refused to answer. She came to the table and rested her hands on the edge of it, leaning down and sneering into my face.

"Determined to steer clear of any violent outburst on my own part, I still ignored her, rose from the table and stepped over to the wall to get my Keats from my own personal shelf. That shelf was the topmost one, and the ladder I used for reaching it none too sturdy. I had climbed the ladder and was standing on the top rung reaching for the book when I heard the rustle of hastily gathered papers and the sound of Minna's voice in a chuckle of malice. I turned quickly.

"The devil in her had seen its chance. She knew I was helpless. *She had seized that entire heap of manuscript and thrown it into the blazing grate!* I almost fell in my haste to get down the ladder and rush toward her. But even before I reached her side I knew it was too late. There she stood punching the papers madly with the heavy poker, screaming insanely at me, and I stopped dead. Every word I had ever written had been licked up by the roaring flames.

"Perhaps you can't see why that was such a cataclysmic thing to me. But you must understand that my poems come to me out of the air, so to speak. After I've once set them down I can't rewrite them. They're like birds of passage, beautiful Birds of Paradise that light on me for a moment, and if I don't capture them immediately they vanish forever. Ten minutes after I've written one, I couldn't rewrite it to save my life. And she had destroyed the long labor, the delight and treasure of all my years. I had forgotten that one publisher had my poems—had held them for six months.

"As I said, I stopped dead. I went cold. Cold as a Cape Horn fog. The unearthly chill crept down slowly from my forehead till it reached my feet. I was a numb statue, incapable of moving, thinking or feeling. I only knew that all the love and beauty of my life and skittered up the flue of that fireplace.

"She wheeled on me, demoniacal satisfaction in her face. 'Now, Mr. Poet,' she shrieked crazily, 'maybe you can get your head out of the clouds! Maybe you can spend a little time on something besides those worthless jingles! Go out into the grove and get some mushrooms for dinner.' She flounced angrily from the room, but for a long time I did not move. I—I—what would you have done, Mr. Blondin?"

He put it to me, just like that. I told him flatly—I'd have killed her.

He caught his breath, then went on softly: "Well—do you know what I did? I went out into the grove and got some mushrooms for dinner. . . . The grove was a full five acres of first-stand pine and fir. In spring and fall the moss was lavishly sprinked with all kinds of mushrooms. I returned from that grove with a pail full of beautiful fungi, which she cleaned, cooked and placed on the table for dinner.

"She knew mushrooms were my hobby, that my scientific knowledge of them precluded any danger. That I never made a mistake. I myself didn't eat any. I couldn't have choked down a mouthful—my throat was tight. I sat watching her in bitter silence as she hungrily devoured the mushroom-smothered steak. She ate her meal with a fiendish relish.

seeming to take delight in showing me how little she cared for what she had done to me.

"That night just before 12 o'clock she called to me. I was sitting in the library in a state of mental lethargy, but I realized that her voice was sharp with some unusual emotion. I went to her quickly. She said she had a horrible pain at the pit of her stomach. Her face was drawn, and little beads of perspiration stood out on her forehead. I carried water to her by the glassful—but she couldn't seem to get enough. I suggested going for a doctor, but she wouldn't let me leave her. She grew weaker, but the pain abated and she said she was getting better. In a few hours she went into a state of coma in which she died without regaining consciousness.

"I didn't seem to realize what had happened. I didn't even know when or where she was buried. There was a spell laid over me that I couldn't break. I forgot the book entirely. I think I forgot life itself. All the impulse I had was to get away, to isolate myself beyond the sight and sound of my kind. To wear out my suffering alone.

"I took what money I needed for the purpose, came up here and built this cabin. I have been here ever since. The first year I was simply an automaton, going about over the hills, not seeing, hearing, tasting or feeling.

"Then one day I went to town for provisions. I saw a windowful of books—gray books lettered in gold. I dropped my bundles in the street, rushed into the store and bought a copy, the very copy you have there in your hand. I ran all the way out of town with that book gripped tight to my heart. I slept out under the pines with it that night—the house couldn't hold me. And there under the pines the ice melted away. I knew them once more, my passion and air and fire. The next morning I wrote the first poem that had come to me in fourteen months!

"After that the years flew. I have written, read, dreamed and created. There's enough manuscript in there to make six volumes of poems. And through it all—I have paid.

"I made a solemn compact with God. I should stay here on this mountain top shut off from the world till someone from the world of affairs should seek me out. Someone of my own clan. Someone who would stay with me as a kindly guest for the night, eating dinner with me upon my place of immolation. Someone who would eat mushrooms I had gathered and cooked. And that was to be a sign from God that my penance was done. Perhaps you will call it the distorted fancy of a twisted brain, but I believe God took me at my word. He has kept me here for ten years.

"And though I had planned mightily what I would do when I was released from my self-imposed penance, I did *not* plan that the man who came to release me would be an author hunting a story! You have your story, Mr. Blondin. Very well. Good-bye—and good luck." And he turned to go back to the cabin.

I caught him by the arm. "Not so fast, Wytten, please," I said. You see I *hadn't* quite got it. "What do you mean—penance?"

He paused for a moment and stood searching the moss with brooding eyes. Then his gaze fell on the thing he sought. He stepped to the base of a huge pine and pulled from the needle-covered moss a great mushroom. Stalk, gills and top of it were a spotless white. Crumbling from the flange, fragile as gossamer, was a flocculent web and a deep snowy cup curled gracefully about the base of the stem. It was exquisitely beautiful. He held it toward me, and as he

spoke there was sinister significance in his tone.

"This, Mr. Blondin, is the worst mankiller that grows in the forest: the *Destroying Angel*, the *Deadly Amanita*. Scientifically and technically, the *Amanita Verna*. There are others of the same family, the *Muscaria* and the *Phalloides*, and so on. But the *Deadly Amanita* is the worst of them all. It is absolutely fatal. There is no antidote known. The poisons in this mushroom are so deadly that they can be neutralized only by hours of boiling in powerful acids.

"Within a short time after eating it—the time varies according to the amount taken into the system—one is attacked with a horrible pain at the pit of the stomach . . . the face becomes drawn . . . there is a severe retching and a continuous craving for large quantities of water . . . the victim becomes weaker as the pain abates . . . at last he enters a state of coma in which he dies without regaining consciousness."

He looked at me steadily, and I hope I shall never again see on any man's face the look I saw on his as he realized that I had begun to comprehend the full significance of what he said.

"You see? Very well." His voice was strained and jerky. "You're too much the author to go back down the mountain with such a story in your possession and not make use of it. And I'm too much the sensitive-souled poet to face the world after it knows. Perhaps, after all, God's answer to me was a thing of Godlike subtlety. I must stay here. And some day—who knows? I nearly live on mushrooms" . . . He held up the lovely lethal thing in his hand.

It will always be a source of inner thanksgiving to me that I wasn't even tempted. Not for an instant. On the contrary I was swept by a wave of nausea. God! We don't climb to heights over the grave of another man's hopes! I snatched the thing from his hand, flinging it to the earth and grinding it savagely under my heel, obliterating it in a panic of haste, as if the very touch of it might make away with him then and there.

"You're wrong!" I cried, gripping his arm in a frenzy. "Wytten, old chap—you're wrong! I've known ever since I came up that I'd never take your story down the mountain. Now I know why. You may be right in your estimate of the author's attitude toward a great story. But there's a point beyond. I'm too much a disciple of the larger good to quarrel with any man's conception of a self-imposed penance for—*for an error in scientific judgment of fungi.* My lips are sealed, Wytten. Get that manuscript!"

So there you are. I did not go down Old Baldy alone. And the story I dared not write dominated my thoughts for nearly a year. During that time I helped Wytten to readjust himself and get a new start in life. I lost out with Madden and it was a couple of years before I caught up again. But I had the greatest reward that ever comes to any of us. I saw the maturing and flowering of another man's hopes.

BLONDIN ceased speaking and his eyes were fixed upon the California sunshine pouring through the window.

Ah—the nigger in the woodpile! Another man's hopes! My thoughts tied my tongue. And it had cost him Madden. Two years of work to get back what he'd lost. Another man's hopes! I looked at Blondin with new eyes. As long as I'd known him I'd never really seen the man before . . .

But this is Henry Wytten's story.

WEIRD STORY REPRINTS

No. 6. What Was It?

A Mystery

By FITZ-JAMES O'BRIEN

IT IS, I confess, with considerable diffidence that I approach the strange narrative which I am about to relate. The events which I purpose detailing are of so extraordinary and unheard-of a character that I am quite prepared to meet with an unusual amount of incredulity and scorn. I accept all such beforehand. I have, I trust, the literary courage to face unbelief. I have, after mature consideration, resolved to narrate, in as simple and straightforward a manner as I can compass, some facts that passed under my observation in the month of July last, and which, in the annals of the mysteries of psychical science, are wholly unparalleled.

I live at No. — Twenty-sixth Street, in this city. The house is in some respects a curious one. It has enjoyed for the last two years the reputation of being haunted. It is a large and stately residence, surrounded by what was once a garden, but which is now only a green inclosure used for bleaching clothes. The dry basin of what has been a fountain, and a few fruit-trees, ragged and unpruned, indicate that this spot, in past days, was a pleasant, shady retreat, filled with fruits and flowers and the sweet murmur of waters.

The house is very spacious. A hall of noble size leads to a vast spiral staircase winding through its center, while the various apartments are of imposing dimensions. It was built some fifteen or twenty years since by Mr. A———, the well-known New York merchant, who five years ago threw the commercial world into convulsions by a stupendous bank fraud. Mr. A———, as everyone knows, escaped to Europe, and died not long after of a broken heart. Almost immediately after the news of his decease reached this country, and was verified, the report spread in Twenty-sixth Street that No. — was haunted. Legal measures had dispossessed the widow of its former owner, and it was inhabited merely by a caretaker and his wife, placed there by the house agent into whose hands it had passed for the purposes of renting or sale. These people declared that they were troubled with unnatural noises. Doors were opened without any visible agency. The remnants of furniture scattered through the various rooms were, during the night, piled one upon the other by unknown hands. Invisible feet passed up and down the stairs in broad daylight, accompanied by the rustle of unseen silk dresses, and the gliding of viewless hands along the massive balusters. The caretaker and his wife declared that they would live there no longer. The house agent laughed, dismissed them, and put others in their place. The noises and supernatural manifestations continued. The neigh-

borhood caught up the story, and the house remained untenanted for three years. Several persons negotiated for it; but somehow, always before the bargain was closed, they heard the unpleasant rumors, and declined to treat any further.

It was in this state of things that my landlady, who at that time kept a boarding house in Bleecker Street, and who wished to move farther up town—conceived the bold idea of renting No. — Twenty-sixth Street. Happening to have in her house rather a plucky and philosophical set of boarders, she laid down her scheme before us, stating candidly everything she had heard respecting the ghostly qualities of the establishment to which she wished to remove us. With the exception of two timid persons,—a sea captain and a returned Californian, who immediately gave notice that they would leave,—all of Mrs. Moffat's guests declared that they would accompany her in her chivalric incursion into the abode of spirits.

Our removal was effected in the month of May, and we were all charmed with our new residence. The portion of Twenty-sixth Street where our house is situated—between Seventh and Eighth Avenues—is one of the pleasantest localities in New York. The gardens back of the houses, running down nearly to the Hudson, form, in the summer time, a perfect avenue of verdure. The air is pure and invigorating, sweeping, as it does, straight across the river from the Weehawken heights, and even the ragged garden which surrounded the house on two sides, although displaying on washing days rather too much clothesline, still gave us a piece of greensward to look at, and a cool retreat in the summer evenings, where we smoked our cigars in the dusk, and watched the fireflies flashing their dark-lanterns in the long grass.

Of course we had no sooner established ourselves at No. — than we began to expect the ghosts. We absolutely awaited their advent with eagerness. Our dinner conversation was supernatural. One of the boarders, who had purchased Mrs. Crowe's *Night Side of Nature* for his own private delectation, was regarded as a public enemy by the entire household for not having bought twenty copies. The man led a life of supreme wretchedness while he was reading this volume. A system of espionage was established, of which he was the victim. If he incautiously laid the book down for an instant and left the room, it was immediately seized and read aloud in secret places to a select few. I found myself a person of immense importance, it having leaked out that I was tolerably well versed in the history of supernaturalism, and had once written a story, entitled *The Pot of Tulips*, for *Harper's Monthly*, the foundation of which was a ghost. If a table or a wainscot panel happened to warp when we were assembled in the large drawing room, there was an instant silence, and everyone was prepared for an immediate clanking of chains and a spectral form.

After a month of psychological excitement, it was with the utmost dissatisfaction that we were forced to acknowledge that nothing in the remotest degree approaching the supernatural had manifested itself. Once the black butler asseverated that his candle had been blown out by some invisible agency while he was undressing himself for the night; but as I had more than once discovered this colored gentleman in a condition when one candle must have appeared to him like two, I thought it possible that, by going a step farther in his potations, he might have reversed his phenomenon, and seen no candle at all where he ought to have beheld one.

THINGS were in this state when an incident took place so awful and inexplicable in its character that my reason fairly reels at the bare memory of the occurrence. It was the tenth of July. After dinner was over I repaired with my friend, Dr. Hammond, to the garden to smoke my evening pipe. The doctor and myself found ourselves in an unusually metaphysical mood. We lit our large meerschaums, filled with fine Turkish tobacco; we paced to and fro, conversing. A strange perversity dominated the currents of our thought. They would *not* flow through the sunlit channels into which we strove to divert them. For some unaccountable reason they constantly diverged into dark and lonesome beds, where a continual gloom brooded. It was in vain that, after our old fashion, we flung ourselves on the shores of the East, and talked of its gay bazars, of the splendors of the time of Haroun, of harems and golden palaces. Black afreets continually arose from the depths of our talk, and expanded, like the one the fisherman released from the copper vessel, until they blotted everything bright from our vision. Insensibly, we yielded to the occult force that swayed us, and indulged in gloomy speculation. We had talked some time upon the proneness of the human mind to mysticism, and the almost universal love of the terrible, when Hammond suddenly said to me, "What do you consider to be the greatest element of terror?"

The question, I own, puzzled me. That many things were terrible, I knew. Stumbling over a corpse in the dark; beholding, as I once did, a woman floating down a deep and rapid river, with wildly lifted arms, and awful, upturned face, uttering, as she sank, shrieks that rent one's heart, while we, the spectators, stood frozen at a window which overhung the river at a height of sixty feet, unable to make the slightest effort to save her, but dumbly watching her last supreme agony and her disappearance. A shattered wreck, with no life visible, encountered floating listlessly on the ocean, is a terrible object, for it suggests a huge terror, the proportions of which are veiled. But it now struck me for the first time that there must be one great and ruling embodiment of fear, a king of terrors to which all others must succumb. What might it be? To what train of circumstances would it owe its existence?

"I confess, Hammond," I replied to my friend, "I never considered the subject before. That there must be one something more terrible than any other thing, I feel. I can not attempt, however, even the most vague definition."

"I am somewhat like you, Harry," he answered. "I feel my capacity to experience terror greater than anything yet conceived by the human mind,—something combining in fearful and unnatural amalgamation hitherto supposed incompatible elements. The calling of the voices in Brockden Brown's novel of *Wieland* is awful; so is the picture of the Dweller of the Threshold, in Bulwer's *Zanoni;* but," he added, shaking his head gloomily, "there is something more horrible still than these."

"Look here, Hammond," I rejoined, "let us drop this kind of talk, for heaven's sake!"

"I don't know what's the matter with me tonight," he replied, "but my brain is running upon all sorts of weird and awful thoughts. I feel as if I could write a story like Hoffmann tonight, if I were only master of a literary style."

"Well, if we are going to be Hoffmannesque in our talk, I'm off to bed. How sultry it is! Good night, Hammond."

"Good night, Harry. Pleasant dreams to you."

"To you, gloomy wretch, afreets, ghouls, and enchanters."

We parted, and each sought his respective chamber. I undressed quickly and got into bed, taking with me, according to my usual custom, a book, over which I generally read myself to sleep. I opened the volume as soon as I had laid my head upon the pillow, and instantly flung it to the other side of the room. It was Goudon's *History of Monsters*—a curious French work, which I had lately imported from Paris, but which, in the state of mind I had then reached, was anything but an agreeable companion. I resolved to go to sleep at once; so, turning down my gas until nothing but a little blue point of light glimmered on the top of the tube, I composed myself to rest.

The room was in total darkness. The atom of gas that still remained lighted did not illuminate a distance of three inches round the burner. I desperately drew my arm across my eyes, as if to shut out even the darkness, and tried to think of nothing. It was in vain. The confounded themes touched on by Hammond in the garden kept obtruding themselves on my brain. I battled against them. I erected ramparts of would-be blankness of intellect to keep them out. They still crowded upon me. While I was lying still as a corpse, hoping that by a perfect physical inaction I should hasten mental repose, an awful incident occurred. A *something* dropped, as it seemed, from the ceiling, plumb upon my chest, and the next instant I felt two bony hands encircling my throat, endeavoring to choke me.

I am no coward, and am possessed of considerable physical strength. The suddenness of the attack, instead of stunning me, strung every nerve to its highest tension. My body acted from instinct, before my brain had time to realize the terrors of my position. In an instant I wound two muscular arms around the creature, and squeezed it, with all the strength of despair, against my chest. In a few seconds the bony hands that had fastened on my throat loosened their hold, and I was free to breathe once more. Then commenced a struggle of awful intensity. Immersed in the most profound darkness, totally ignorant of the nature of the *thing* by which I was so suddenly attacked, finding my grasp slipping every moment, by reason, it seemed to me, of the entire nakedness of my assailant, bitten with sharp teeth in the shoulder, neck, and chest, having every moment to protect my throat against a pair of sinewy, agile hands, which my utmost efforts could not confine—these were a combination of circumstances to combat which required all the strength and skill and courage that I possessed.

At last after a silent, deadly, exhausting struggle, I got my assailant under by a series of incredible efforts of strength. Once pinned, with my knee on what I made out to be its chest, I knew that I was victor. I rested for a moment to breathe. I heard the creature beneath me panting in the darkness, and felt the violent throbbing of a heart. It was apparently as exhausted as I was; that was one comfort. At this moment I remembered that I usually placed under my pillow, before going to bed, a large yellow silk pocket handkerchief, for use during the night. I felt for it instantly; it was there. In a few seconds more I had, after a fashion, pinioned the creature's arms.

I now felt tolerably secure. There was nothing more to be done but to turn on the gas, and, having first seen what my midnight assailant was like, arouse the household. I will confess to being actuated by a certain pride in not giving the alarm be-

fore; I wished to make the capture alone and unaided.

Never losing my hold for an instant, I slipped from the bed to the floor, dragging my captive with me. I had but a few steps to make to reach the gas-burner; these I made with the greatest caution, holding the creature in a grip like a vise. At last I got within arm's length of the tiny speck of blue light which told me where the gas-burner lay. Quick as lightning I released my grasp with one hand and let on the full flood of light. Then I turned to look at my captive.

I CAN not even attempt to give any definition of my sensations the instant after I turned on the gas. I suppose I must have shrieked with terror, for in less than a minute afterward my room was crowded with the inmates of the house. I shudder now as I think of that awful moment. *I saw nothing!* Yes; I had one arm firmly clasped round a breathing, panting, corporeal shape, my other hand gripped with all its strength a throat as warm, and apparently fleshy, as my own; and yet, with this living substance in my grasp, with its body pressed against my own, and all in the bright glare of a large jet of gas, I absolutely beheld nothing! Not even an outline,—a vapor!

I do not, even at this hour, realize the situation in which I found myself. I can not recall the astounding incident thoroughly. Imagination in vain tries to compass the awful paradox.

It breathed. I felt its warm breath upon my cheek. It struggled fiercely. It had hands. They clutched me. Its skin was smooth, like my own. There it lay, pressed close against me, solid as stone,—and yet utterly invisible!

I wonder that I did not faint or go mad on the instant. Some wonderful instinct must have sustained me; for, absolutely, in place of loosening my hold on the terrible enigma, I seemed to gain an additional strength in my moment of horror, and tightened my grasp with such wonderful force that I felt the creature shivering with agony.

Just then Hammond entered my room at the head of the household. As soon as he beheld my face—which, I suppose, must have been an awful sight to look at—he hastened forward, crying, "Great heaven, Harry! What has happened?"

"Hammond! Hammond!" I cried; "come here. Oh! this is awful! I have been attacked in bed by something or other, which I have hold of; but I can't see it—I can't see it!"

Hammond, doubtless struck by the unfeigned horror expressed in my countenance, made one or two steps forward with an anxious yet puzzled expression. A very audible titter burst from the remainder of my visitors. This suppressed laughter made me furious. To laugh at a human being in my position! It was the worst species of cruelty. *Now*, I can understand why the appearance of a man struggling violently, as it would seem, with an airy nothing, and calling for assistance against a vision, should have appeared ludicrous. *Then*, so great was my rage against the mocking crowd that had I the power I would have stricken them dead where they stood.

"Hammond! Hammond!" I cried again, despairingly; "for God's sake come to me. I can hold the—the *thing* but a short while longer. It is overpowering me. Help me! Help me!"

"Harry," whispered Hammond, approaching me, "you have been smoking too much."

"I swear to you, Hammond, that this is no vision," I answered, in the same low tone. "Don't you see how it shakes my whole frame with its

struggles? If you don't believe me, convince yourself. Feel it,—touch it."

Hammond advanced and laid his hand on the spot I indicated. A wild cry of horror burst from him. He had felt it!

In a moment he had discovered somewhere in my room a long piece of cord, and was the next instant winding it and knotting it about the body of the unseen being that I clasped in my arms.

"Harry," he said, in a hoarse, agitated voice, for, though he preserved his presence of mind he was deeply moved, "Harry, it's all safe now. You may let go, old fellow, if you're tired. The thing can't move."

I was utterly exhausted, and I gladly loosed my hold.

Hammond stood holding the ends of the cord that bound the Invisible, twisted round his hand, while before him, self-supporting as it were, he beheld a rope laced and interlaced, and stretching tightly round a vacant space. I never saw a man look so thoroughly stricken with awe. Nevertheless his face expressed all the courage and determination which I knew him to possess. His lips, although white, were set firmly, and one could perceive at a glance that, although stricken with fear, he was not daunted.

The confusion that ensued among the guests of the house who were witnesses of this extraordinary scene between Hammond and myself,—who beheld the pantomime of binding this struggling something,—who beheld me almost sinking from physical exhaustion when my task of jailer was over—the confusion and terror that took possession of the bystanders, when they saw all this, was beyond description. The weaker ones fled from the apartment. The few who remained clustered near the door, and could not be induced to approach Hammond and his charge. Still incredulity broke out through their terror. They had not the courage to satisfy themselves, and yet they doubted. It was in vain that I begged of some of the men to come near and convince themselves by touch of the existence in that room of a living being which was invisible. They were incredulous, but did not dare undeceive themselves. How could a solid, living, breathing body be invisible? they asked. My reply was this. I gave a sign to Hammond, and both of us—conquering our fearful repugnance to touch the invisible creature—lifted it from the ground, manacled as it was, and took it to my bed. Its weight was about that of a boy of fourteen.

"Now, my friends," I said, as Hammond and myself held the creature suspended over the bed, "I can give you self-evident proof that here is a solid, ponderable body which, nevertheless, you can not see. Be good enough to watch the surface of the bed attentively."

I was astonished at my own courage in treating this strange event so calmly; but I had recovered from my first terror, and felt a sort of scientific pride in the affair which dominated every other feeling.

The eyes of the bystanders were immediately fixed on my bed. At a given signal Hammond and I let the creature fall. There was the dull sound of a heavy body alighting on a soft mass. The timbers of the bed creaked. A deep impression marked itself distinctly upon the pillow and on the bed itself. The crowd who witnessed this gave a sort of low, universal cry, and rushed from the room. Hammond and I were left alone with our mystery.

WE REMAINED silent for some time listening to the low, irregular breathing of the creature on the bed, and watching the rustle of the bedclothes as it impotently struggled to

free itself from confinement. Then Hammond spoke.

"Harry, this is awful."

"Aye, awful."

"But not unaccountable."

"Not unaccountable! What do you mean? Such a thing has never occurred since the birth of the world. I know not what to think, Hammond. God grant that I am not mad, and that this is not an insane fantasy!"

"Let us reason a little, Harry. Here is a solid body which we touch, but which we can not see. The fact is so unusual that it strikes us with terror. Is there no parallel, though, for such a phenomenon? Take a piece of pure glass. It is tangible and transparent. A certain chemical coarseness is all that prevents its being so entirely transparent as to be totally invisible. It is not *theoretically impossible*, mind you, to make a glass which shall not reflect a single ray of light—a glass so pure and homogeneous in its atoms that the rays from the sun shall pass through it as they do through the air, refracted but not reflected. We do not see the air, and yet we feel it."

"That's all very well, Hammond, but these are inanimate substances. Glass does not breathe, air does not breathe. *This* thing has a heart that palpitates,—a will that moves it,—lungs that play, and inspire and respire."

"You forget the strange phenomena of which we have so often heard of late," answered the doctor, gravely. "At the meetings called 'spirit circles,' invisible hands have been thrust into the hands of those persons round the table—warm, fleshly hands that seemed to pulsate with mortal life."

"What? Do you think, then, that this thing is—"

"I don't know what it is," was the solemn reply; "but please the gods I will, with your assistance, thoroughly investigate it."

We watched together, smoking many pipes, all night long, by the bedside of the unearthly being that tossed and panted until it was apparently wearied out. Then we learned by the low, regular breathing that it slept.

The next morning the house was all astir. The boarders congregated on the landing outside my room, and Hammond and myself were lions. We had to answer a thousand questions as to the state of our extraordinary prisoner, for as yet not one person in the house except ourselves could be induced to set foot in the apartment.

The creature was awake. This was evidenced by the convulsive manner in which the bedclothes were moved in its efforts to escape. There was something truly terrible in beholding, as it were, those second-hand indications of the terrible writhings and agonized struggles for liberty which themselves were invisible.

Hammond and myself had racked our brains during the long night to discover some means by which we might realize the shape and general appearance of the enigma. As well as we could make out by passing our hands over the creature's form, its outlines and lineaments were human. There was a mouth; a round, smooth head without hair; a nose, which, however, was little elevated above the cheeks; and its hands and feet felt like those of a boy. At first we thought of placing the being on a smooth surface and tracing its outline with chalk, as shoemakers trace the outline of the foot. This plan was given up as being of no value. Such an outline would give not the slightest idea of its conformation.

A happy thought struck me. We would take a cast of it in plaster of Paris. This would give us the solid figure, and satisfy our wishes. But how to do it? The movements of the creature would disturb the setting of

the plastic covering, and distort the mold. Another thought. Why not give it chloroform? It had respiratory organs—that was evident by its breathing. Once reduced to a state of insensibility, we could do with it what we would. Dr. X——— was sent for; and after the worthy physician had recovered from the first shock of amazement, he proceeded to administer the chloroform. In three minutes afterward we were enabled to remove the fetters from the creature's body, and a well-known modeler of this city was busily engaged in covering the invisible form with the moist clay. In five minutes more we had a mold, and before evening a rough facsimile of the mystery. It was shaped like a man,—distorted, uncouth, and horrible, but still a man. It was small, not over four feet and some inches in height, and its limbs revealed a muscular development that was unparalleled. Its face surpassed in hideousness anything I had ever seen. Gustave Doré or Callot, or Tony Johannot, never conceived anything so horrible. There is a face in one of the latter's illustrations to *Un Voyage Où il Vous Plaira,* which somewhat approaches the countenance of this creature, but does not equal it. It was the physiognomy of what I should have fancied a ghoul to be. It looked as if it was capable of feeding on human flesh.

Having satisfied our curiosity, and bound everyone in the house to secrecy, it became a question what was to be done with our enigma. It was impossible that we keep such a horror in our house; it was equally impossible that such an awful being be let loose upon the world. I confess that I would have gladly voted for the creature's destruction. But who would shoulder the responsibility? Who would undertake the execution of this horrible semblance of a human being? Day after day this question was deliberated gravely. The boarders all left the house. Mrs. Moffat was in despair, and threatened Hammond and myself with all sorts of legal penalties if we did not remove the horror. Our answer was, "We will go if you like, but we decline taking this creature with us. Remove it yourself if you please. It appeared in your house. On you the responsibility rests." To this there was, of course, no answer. Mrs. Moffat could not obtain for love or money a person who would even approach the mystery.

The most singular part of the transaction was that we were entirely ignorant of what the creature habitually fed on. Everything in the way of nutriment that we could think of was placed before it, but was never touched. It was awful to stand by, day after day, and see the clothes toss, hear the hard breathing, and know that it was starving.

Ten, twelve days, a fortnight passed, and it still lived. The pulsations of the heart, however, were daily growing fainter, and had now nearly ceased altogether. It was evident that the creature was dying for want of sustenance. While this terrible life struggle was going on, I felt miserable. I could not sleep of nights. Horrible as the creature was, it was pitiful to think of the pangs it was suffering.

At last it died. Hammond and I found it cold and stiff one morning in the bed. The heart had ceased to beat, the lungs to inspire. We hastened to bury it in the garden. It was a strange funeral, the dropping of that viewless corpse into the damp hole. The cast of its form I gave to Dr. X———, who keeps it in his museum in Tenth Street.

As I am on the eve of a long journey from which I may not return, I have drawn up this narrative of an event the most singular that has ever come to my knowledge.

A Tale of the Eruption of Mont Pelée

The Consul's Bones

By W. J. STAMPER

Author of "Lips of the Dead," "The Vulture of Pignon," etc.

THE *General Frisbie* of the Monticello Steamship Line had left Vallejo behind by about five minutes and was now ploughing her way through the green waters of San Pablo Bay, on her monotonous two hour run to San Francisco. Certain duties had obliged me to make this trip daily for three weeks and the everlasting sameness of the coast line as well as the businesslike air of all the passengers was getting on my nerves. After an unsuccessful attempt to get something out of my paper besides divorce scandals and politics, I made myself as comfortable as possible in the smoking room on the upper deck, prepared to glance at my watch exactly one hundred and fifteen times before finally beholding the tall white pile of the Ferry Building in San Francisco.

I had not scanned the face of my timepiece the tenth time, ere I was aware of the fact that a certain person sitting on the opposite side of the room was casting furtive glances at me. He was short and stocky, about forty-five years of age, with a countenance which I judged could only have obtained its extreme severity from a trip to the North Pole.

Any doubts as to his interest in me were dispelled when he arose, walked over, held out his hand to me and said, "My name is Adam Lawson, and I am a retired petty officer of the United States Navy."

"Very glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Lawson," said I, extending my hand and repeating the very odd and embarrassing cognomen which had been bestowed upon me by some thoughtless ancestor.

After the usual civilities required by polite society, Mr. Lawson seated himself beside me, and pointing to a small campaign bar which I always wear over the left pocket of my uniform blouse, began, "I take it from that bar, you have been to Haiti."

"Yes," I answered; "I was unfortunate enough to be involved in one of those countless petty broils so common in the Black Republic, and other than a stubborn and intermittent malaria, that is all I have to remind me of eighteen months of very distasteful duty."

"Do you know," continued Lawson, "that whenever I see anything to recall my mind to Haiti, it reminds me of one of the most momentous occasions of my life?"

"We have an hour and three quarters," said I, "and something in your face, Mr. Lawson, leads me to believe that there is many a worthwhile yarn in your career. Out with it."

After cramming an unbelievable amount of tobacco into his long pipe and leaning back against the seat at perfect ease, he recounted the following remarkable story.

IT WAS in August, 1902, to the best of my recollection, and I was a boatswain's mate aboard a certain American cruiser, the name of which, for a reason best known to myself, I shall not mention. She was taking

coal at Mole St. Nicholas on the western coast of Haiti, and we were hurrying up the job because she was slated to steam for Dry Tortugas the next morning.

The sun was just setting and I was congratulating myself on the good rest in store for me that night, when I observed the captain, surrounded by a group of officers on the bridge, talking and gesticulating excitedly. My first thought was that another Haitian president had been crucified, but presently the bugler sounded general assembly, and as all hands rushed above, I noticed that the captain held a cablegram in his hand.

We were under way in twenty minutes. Every boiler was in use, and on leaving the bay we headed at full steam southward toward the Island of Navassa, a bleak and barren rock that marks the westernmost point of Haiti. None of the enlisted men had any idea where we were going, and many a wild and fantastic guess was hazarded in the fire room that night as to our probable destination. Some said we were bound for Vera Cruz, others that we were hurrying around the Horn to protect the Pacific coast from the Japanese.

The second morning found the cruiser wallowing twenty miles off the Island of Martinique in the French West Indies, and the secret had leaked out. The volcano on Mont Pelée had erupted, destroying the city of St. Pierre, and we had been rushed to the assistance of the inhabitants.

My friend, I could never describe the inferno that lay off our port bow; but I will say this much—a great pall of gray smoke overhung the stricken island, a cloud so dense that land could not be seen. Fiery red streaks of forked lightning leaped and split through that gray mass. Peals of thunder, like the distant roar of artillery, were borne to us over the water. Huge waves smashed against the ship and broke boiling over the poop-deck. Such was the immensity of the tidal wave that had accompanied the catastrophe, that dead fish and other dwellers of the deep were carried on to our decks on every crest. Even at this great distance a light ash or cinder sifted through our masts and covered the ship like frost.

For two days we cruised up and down that terrible coast, our minds dismal with thoughts of what destruction lay behind that ominous pall of smoke and dust. We did not dare approach closer until it cleared up, because deadly gases were undoubtedly present, gases that would burn the tender tissue of our lungs to a cinder such as that which overspread our decks.

The third morning disclosed a coffin of heavy rough lumber lying on the quarterdeck, and all hands were filled with wonderment. The pall had now dropped low over the city, and the top of Pelée was visible. We were, at this time, five miles off the coast, and the thunders and lightnings had ceased.

I was not a little surprized when the marine orderly notified me that the captain wished to see me in his cabin immediately.

He was pacing up and down excitedly when I entered, and without returning my salute, announced:

"Lawson, I have an errand for you. You will take my gig and eight seamen (you may pick your own men), land at St. Pierre with the coffin above on the quarterdeck, and procure the body of the American consul. From the bridge I shall observe the crater of the volcano for signs of further eruption. If there are any, three blasts from the ship's siren will be your signal to return. Stephen Young, a Jamaican messboy, who spent most of his life in the city, will act as your guide to the consulate. Be ready to leave in half an

hour. If there are no questions, that is all."

As I left the cabin my heart was heavy with the responsibility that had been thrust upon me. Why I had been singled out to execute this gruesome task, when there were scores of officers available, will probably ever remain one of the mysteries of naval history. Orders were orders, and I had never before hesitated for a moment to put my best efforts into the execution of the wishes of my superiors, however unjust they may have appeared to be.

At the appointed time the gig splashed in the water and I, with my chosen seamen, the messboy and the coffin, pulled toward that dismal pall.

When we arrived within a half-mile of the island, the water was as smooth as a mill-pond, so damnably still and sullen, my friend, that I cursed it inwardly. It seemed to betoken the misery and destruction that lay ahead, the co-mate of death itself. The smoke cloud hung so near above our heads that I expected it to lower any moment and suffocate us. Our lungs felt a strange and appalling constriction and the sweat stood out in great beads on the stern faces of my comrades as they bent to the heavy oars. The messboy's face was a study in terror, his eyes weirdly wild and rolling. There was such an odor that we were sick unto death, and it drifted toward us as we came in; but like men, we went to meet it. Here and there on the motionless bosom of the bay was strewn the sad and floating wreckage of what had once been a gay and prosperous city; carts and housetops, chickencoops and cradles, cats and dogs and—God forbid, my friend!—swollen, drenched and staring human beings, dead these many days, and the sullen waters had cast them up. There they hung suspended, some with arms outstretched, others with their bloated stomachs puffed above the glassy surface.

Once, and only once, we stopped. The stroke oar became entangled in the long black hair of a floating corpse, young and white,—a woman, and she had to be dragged alongside before we could extricate the oar. When we loosed her, she sank slowly and silently back into her watery bed and we sped on.

Now we had come to what had one time been the docks, a mass of tangled wreckage and debris. They had collapsed and it was only after much difficulty that we effected a landing and secured the gig to the single post that yet remained standing. Leaving two men in the boat with strict orders to listen for the signal, I directed the others to shoulder the coffin and follow the terrified messboy, and we set out in search of the consulate.

Everything looked the same to me. To the front, to the right, to the left, all was ruin, and above all that terrible cloud. Stephen led us up a street, if such it could be called, but I was soon convinced that the city had been so completely changed by the holocaust that he did not know where he was going.

A thick white ash covered everything knee-deep. All around lay heaps of charred and blackened bodies just as they had been caught in little groups the morning of the disaster. They had been overtaken and died as they chatted, I thought. Some were in a sitting posture against the tottering and crumbling walls, their faces were burned off and the ghastly, white cheek-bones sent a chill of horror through my body. Their hands lay at their sides, buried in the terrible cinder. There was not to be seen a single living thing. Ruin. Silence. Terror. Death reigned supreme. Not even the vindictive volcano uttered from its molten

throat a sound to break that awful silence. The buildings had dissolved and crumbled down. They were all the same, a terrible, twisted mass of wreckage that seemed about to shriek out in misery.

We were sick unto death following the cowering messboy, when he at length stopped before a great white mass of tumbled ruins and exclaimed in a hoarse voice:

"Here it is. The consulate."

To me it made little difference whether he was right or wrong.

There were no doors, no roofs. Nothing but parts of the tottering wall remained standing, and over all that ghastly ash. I clambered over a low gap in the ruin, and the ashes touching my hands were yet warm. The first sight that met my eyes made me shudder with horror.

Here the wall had only partly caved in, thus leaving a sort of shelter for what had once been a bathroom. The bathtub was intact, a huge affair, filled with water and cinders. The bather, a woman, lay floating among the ashes. The flesh had been cooked and now, after these many days, was dissolving. I turned away in disgust. I can see those bulging and blistered eyes today.

The coffin was deposited among the cinders and awaited the consul's bones. I knew the consul was a white man, but in that charnel-house there was nothing white save bones and ashes. With our spades we stirred that putrid mass. The bodies were so commingled and charred that recognition of any particular one was impossible.

Suddenly I stirred up some pieces of cloth entirely whole and uninjured. They were napkins. I thought if all the napkins in all the American consulates of the world were put in one heap, there would not be this many. I turned up the edge of one, read some words worked thereon and hurriedly covered them up before my comrades saw what I was about. These were the words: "HOTEL DE FRANCE."

I picked up a charred skeleton and said to my men as I placed it in the coffin:

"I put some bones in this casket. Whose are they?"

"They are the consul's bones," they replied with one voice, husky and dry.

These had been the first words uttered since our arrival.

The American sailor is a discreet man. Each and every one grasped my meaning as plainly as if I had explained. They, as well as I, realized the utter hopelessness of seeking farther the body of the true American consul.

"Do you understand, Stephen?" I said to the messboy.

"I understand. Those are the consul's bones," he muttered.

As four of my men stooped to lift the heavy coffin, the dense cloud above descended upon us and I saw them but dimly. A hot current of nauseating air rushed upon us and I felt the perspiration burst from every pore as my lungs struggled for the oxygen they must have. Stephen fell groveling at my feet, grasped my legs and screamed in a wild and husky voice:

"It is the end! I am smothering! Let us flee!"

Then the long pent-up fury of the elements broke—the floodgates of heaven opened—a million ripping thunders shook the earth till we trembled — lurid sheets of flame-lightning rent the cloud to shreds—the waters fell as if the sea had been dropped upon our heads. I could not see one of my comrades. I held my hands over my nose and mouth to keep from drowning.

For one solid hour the torrents poured from the growling heavens.

Bedlam ceased as suddenly as it began, and the cloud rolled out to sea. There we stood, soaked, and shivering with fear, as we watched the storm move against our ship. We strained our eyes but the ship was gone. She had fled to refuge and left us stranded on this island of the rotting dead. Why? I do not know, my friend, but she left us.

I glanced at the coffin. It was filled with water. I soon discovered that the flood had made a veritable mush of the cinder and ashes and from this knew that we could never bear the coffin back to the beach. An idea suddenly occurred to me and I adopted it immediately.

I fished among the ghastly contents of the coffin, took out some of the larger bones and put them in my knapsack.

"Forward, march!" I commanded, and we struck out through the mire and slush toward the beach. White bones, washed clean of the ashes, lay on every side. Did mortal eyes ever look on scene so desolate before?

When we arrived at the docks our boat was gone. Its fate and that of our two comrades are written on the scroll of the mysteries of the deep.

All through that terrible afternoon, I stood and searched the great heaving bosom of the Caribbean for sight of the cruiser, but in vain.

With our spades and shovels we cleared a space of some twenty feet square, for I wished again to stand on solid earth. There we stood and stared seaward till the dark shades of night descended upon the noisome scene. I prayed for the blackness of Egyptian night to blot out the sight of those tottering, white ruins.

A great red and sorrowful moon, rising over the benighted city, cast its weird beams over the heaps of silent dead and the bleak, white ruins of the crumbling cathedrals.

I could never explain, my friend, the feelings that came over me as I heard from far up in the city the measured toll of a church bell. You will say it was the result of my nervous condition, and the horrors I had seen that day. No. The sound of that church bell was registered as plainly on my ear-drum as the chug of the engine I now hear below. My comrades sat hunched there in the pale light, put their fingers in their ears, but uttered no syllable. I saw very plainly that no church tower was standing, but I could hear at regular intervals the measured toll. I did not then know as I do now, that there was but one survivor of the dread catastrophe and he a helpless prisoner, deep down in a dark vault, beneath tons of wreckage and cinder; but I do know that all through that horrible night, the church bell tolled the passing of the dead just as one may hear it any day when the coffin is carried from the hearse. Who tolled that bell? I do not know.

It was 3 o'clock in the morning and my eyes felt like chunks of hot metal. It is the time when parties break up, the time when revelers go home, I thought.

Though the streets were blocked with wreckage, though soft mire lay knee-deep on the pavements, I heard the footfalls of a horse, sharp and clear. They drew nearer and nearer.

"Do you hear anything?" I whispered to my comrades.

No answer came.

From behind a white and crumbling column a half block away I saw a coach appear in the moonlight. It took a course which would cause it to pass close to us. My body felt chill and I was trembling, not with fright, my friend, but from standing in the awe-inspiring presence of the unknown, the unexplainable. Onward it came and the horse's footfalls were sharp and clear as if they fell on bare and solid marble. The

horse was as white as snow, and he seemed to glide along on top of the chalky ruins like a phantom. His eyes were two balls of reddest, blazing fire. The coach followed the horse although there was no attachment to join them together. It was of the transparency of glass and it did not roll but slid along noiselessly. The occupants were two men and two women. Their faces were as pale and pasty as death itself. The men wore black, the women white, and I saw the flash of jewels. It passed, continued on to the edge of the bay, glided out upon the water and on out to sea. I could still hear the measured hoof-beats of the horse. I saw it melt into the red moon as that weird satellite sank beneath the waves, and all was darkness.

"Did you see that?" I asked.

"Yes, we saw," they all replied.

There we sat huddled and silent till the sun came up and blazed over the city of the dead. Morning brought the cruiser back, and a boat to carry us away.

Once aboard I reverently delivered the consul's bones to the captain. I have heard that in a certain cemetery in the East there is a grave, rose-covered and mossy, above which stands a stone to the memory of the American consul who died at his post of duty on the Island of Martinique.

RETRIBUTION

By GEORGE T. SPILLMAN

MIGHTY is the storm that rages in the sky; but it is as nothing to the storm that rages in the heart of the murderer. As he stumbles through the wet underbrush, every vivid flash of lightning is a searchlight spying him out; every dead limb that bars his path is the hand of justice outstretched to stay his flight; every roll of thunder is the gun in his pursuer's hand. The rain has drenched him, and his wet clothes chafe his body painfully, but he is not conscious of this. In stark-blind, unthinking terror, pursued by nothing save the gnawings of his own guilty conscience, he plunges deeper and deeper into the treacherous forest. Suddenly his foot drops into a hole, and his body crashes heavily to the ground. A single, agonizing pain in his leg—then blackness . . .

His consciousness returns. He sits up—he can not stand. The leg—perhaps it is broken.

It is dark, but a sickly moon casts milky shafts of light down through the foliage. The shadows are thick, but—horrors of hell! What is this? A white transparent shape is hovering over him. It is visible—yet invisible. He sees through it like a film, but still it is there—it is something! To his terror-crazed eyes it takes the shape of a grisly specter. It is the man whom he killed but a few hours ago. The face—ever so faint—is leering at him with hate and triumph. The murderer closes his eyes. With a trembling hand, he raises the revolver and places the cold barrel between his eyes. He pulls the trigger.

Who will tell him that the ghost was only a wet spider's web, glistening in the moonlight? Once more has destiny played her card. The revolver, still smoking, lies on the damp ground, but now *two* bullets are missing from the clip. The retribution is complete.

The Last Man

by Douglas Oliver

THIS story is Seldom Swift's own. In reproducing it I have adhered faithfully to the narrative as it fell from his lips. As he hesitatingly unfolded the uncanny events in this weird drama I would have questioned his sanity but for my long and intimate friendship with him.

What is the answer? Perhaps some reader of this magazine may be able to supply it. Swift, himself, is still puzzling.—D. O.

IT HAD stopped raining. The skies were beginning to clear. Swift prayed for the early appearance of some landmark which might direct him, unfalteringly, to Jean Stacquet's estaminet at the crossroads.

Swift was angry. Two hours of floundering through the ruin of the old, fallen trench systems of the ridge were enough to take the heart out of any man, he avowed, even a man as imperturbable as he. As he took stock of his clothing, filthy from rain and constant contact with spongy shell craters into which he sloffed at every step, it seemed, he inwardly cursed the turn of mind that had prompted him to quit the Arras road, rough and winding as it was, for the cross-country track on which he stood. For that track, instead of bringing him to Stacquet's place with its glowing windows, ahead of schedule, had transported him to a veritable wilderness country.

"Fine place to spend the night," Swift mused, his eyes alert for the first sign of a star.

He was lost—hopelessly lost—and he knew it. Presently his foot slipped and he was thrown heavily against a coil of wire, many of whose rusted barbs fastened in his garments. Briefly he struggled, then kicked himself loose, one leg of his breeches going with the final effort.

Swift was about to give audible expression to his feelings when the words froze on his lips. Out of the darkness ahead—how close he could not say—had come a voice. Swift paused as if transfixed, head in the air like a thirsty setter pup winding water, eyes endeavoring to penetrate the wall of black about him.

Somewhere in front a man was singing softly. It was a pleasing

baritone Swift heard. Now and then he made out the sway of the lyric.

Just a song at twilight, when the lights are low,
And the flickering shadows softly come and go.

The last echo died away. Swift could feel cold sweat standing out upon his neck, trickling down beneath his flannel collar. He attempted to rid himself of the catch in his throat; tried to do it quietly, but the bleat he produced evoked even stranger action on the part of the unknown.

"Another step there—and I'll jam this bayonet through you," was the ultimatum hurled at Swift, who brought himself up with a jerk, crouched lower, shaking, trying to reassemble his scattered senses.

Again from out of the gloom came the voice of the challenger, as unmistakably threatening as it was British.

"Who are you?" it rasped. "Hurry up, and let me get a look at you."

"Friend," Swift stammered. Then he added, his voice quavering, "Tourist from St. Pol—who are you?"

"Advance, friend," came the steely command, accompanied by a sudden jangle of equipment that threw Swift's nerves into a similar jangle.

There was little hurry about Swift's advance. In fact it seemed most deliberate. It was not his much boasted imperturbability that restrained him, but rather, grave concern that had gripped his knees as well as his throat with the first mysterious cry from the Stygian darkness. Nevertheless he did go forward, for he retained sufficient clearness of mind to realize that strange individuals who held up inoffensive travelers at the point of the bayonet were not to be trifled with under any circumstances.

And Swift thought it reasonable to expect, if highway robbery was the man's intent, such a trap as that into which he (Swift) had seemingly blundered would have called for a setting on some trafficked highway, and not the middle of a devastated battle area, traveled but rarely throughout the year and then never by night for obvious reasons. Moreover, no present-day, died-in-the-wool bandit, Swift concluded, was apt to give warning of his presence as this man, by singing, had done.

Slowly, step by step, Swift edged on, one hand buried in the side pocket of his coat where reposed a stumpy but businesslike automatic. And ere he took the final stride that carried him within striking distance of his challenger, a steadied finger was caressing the delicate trigger of the Colt.

Swift could feel the man's breath fanning his cheek. He deemed it wise to grant the fellow the first move. That move was slow in forthcoming. Meanwhile Swift bent his gaze in scrutiny of the blurred figure before him. Gradually the blur resolved itself into the awkward lines of a fighting man, a soldier, a Tommy, a typical representative of the British Expeditionary Force in complete battle order from the short rifle he gripped to the steel hat that topped off a good six feet of brawn and muscle.

Swift's mind strayed momentarily in reflection. He knew the last units of the British Expeditionary Force had crossed the channel two years before; that now no man of that monster organization was doing duty in France. Yet here—here before him . . .

"You've come at last," interrupted the unknown. "You are my relief—I expect?"

Swift's eyes almost popped from his head.

"I have been waiting a long time for you," the stranger went on. He

sighed heavily as if rid, at last, of some great burden.

Swift leaned forward, trying to examine the face of the speaker, little of which could be seen for the ill-fitting helmet tilted down upon it.

"Surprized, sir?" inquired the unknown.

"Just the least," Swift managed to get out. "I have been in France but three days—comparative stranger, so to speak."

"But your mission concerns me—surely?" The man's voice registered concern.

"Certainly," returned Swift, who figured one answer as good as the next, and thought it was wise to humor this fellow, whoever he was.

"You will take over at once?"

"If everything is satisfactory," assented Swift, realizing he was plunging into still deeper water.

"Splendid," said the man. He thrust his rifle against the wall of the sagged trench in which he stood and told Swift to follow. They traveled a scant thirty yards through ankle-deep mire. Swift's knees wobbled considerably and he hoped his guide would not hear them knocking together. What mysterious business, he asked himself, was this on which he was engaged? How long was it to keep up? What would it mean to him? He groped deeper in his side pocket where the serrated grip of the automatic felt reassuring to the touch.

Ahead gleamed the eye of a small pocket lamp. "Here, sir," called the unknown, whose thumb was playing with the button of the flash. A narrow shaft of light thrown upward to the crumbled parados came to rest on one of the familiar white crosses of the battlefields. This cross was aged and weather-beaten. A few fragments only of its original markings remained. To Swift's gaze, these, in the pale illumination from the tiny torch, seemed to stand out doubly prominent.

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Silence enveloped the pair, broken only by the occasional spit of a rain drop.

"Well?" said Swift.

"My cross," was the terse reply.

Swift staggered.

"You don't mean to tell me"—he whispered, brokenly,—"you can't be dead—it's impossible . . ."

"But true, nevertheless," came the unruffled response. "You should know that, though."

"Quite so—quite so," murmured Swift, a sudden numbness creeping over him. "Instructions a bit confusing, you know—sorry . . ."

His tongue failed him. His head swam. As from afar he heard the other speaking.

"I'm the man you want, all right. That's my piece of wood—my cross I was killed just before the Vimy show. Officially killed, I mean. But mistakes will be made."

"Mistakes?" asked Swift feebly.

"A great mistake, sir. Damn them for their mistakes. It's Whitey—not I—that lies under that cross—*there*.

"You see when the shell got both of us it took me in the head." (The man jerked impatiently at the strap of his helmet. The steel headgear fell away. It was a scarred, heart-sickening face on which Swift looked.) "For a long time my mind went back on me. It seemed eternity, in fact, before I learned of the blunder. Poor old Whitey, there, buried for me.

"Often Whitey, in his loneliness, calls out to me, and I come and sit through the night with him. Time and time again Whitey tells me: 'They won't be much longer coming now, old boy. Your relief will soon

be here, old boy. It can't be much longer now.'

"A whole year I've waited, sir—and now you're here. My vigil is over. I have kept my promise—I've stuck by Whitey—I've kept faith—thank God!"

Bony fingers cut deep into Swift's shoulders. "You'll take over immediately, sir?" pleaded the unknown.

The shiver that ran through Swift's frame must have betrayed itself to the man, for his demeanor altered with astonishing suddenness.

"Are you playing with me?" he demanded hoarsely.

"No — no — I'm not," declared Swift, but his words of denial sounded empty and flat. He sensed instant hostility on the part of the other.

"You are tricking me—you scoundrel." The words came like so many scissor snips. The unknown leaped at Swift, who sprang aside instinctively.

"I meant no harm," Swift expostulated. "How could you expect me to understand?" He tried to get the gun out of his pocket, but the hammer caught in the lining.

"I'll teach you to understand, then," bellowed the stranger as he again came at Swift. The latter knew now he was facing a madman; realized that his antagonist had caught up some cudgel from the trench bottom; saw him swing it on high.

"Now you die—you!" he heard the man pant.

Swift took a desperate chance. He fired through his coat, point-blank. Twice he pulled the trigger. He heard the heavy slugs zoom through space. He knew he had missed. He threw himself backward.

A great weight fell across his head. A thousand stars danced before his eyes. He experienced the sensation of slowly sinking—sinking. Would he never stop sinking? Would he—

. . .

2

"UGH-UGH," grunted Swift, picking himself up from the bare flooring.

What a nightmare!

Swift took one glance at the rickety bed from which he had tumbled, then dived beneath the coverlets as the "clump-clump" of *Madame's* sabots sounded on the stairs without.

For the first time Swift noticed how sore he was. He ached in every limb. His head throbbed abominably. What had got into him? His head had seemed as clear as a bell when he had retired. Touch of fever, likely. Through the open window wafted an unmistakable barnyard odor. Lord! No wonder, thought Swift. Enough to cause an epidemic.

A light knock at the door. Swift heard the old dame cackling: "*M'sieu—M'sieu.*"

"Come in," Swift called listlessly. A polite "*bon jour*" he added, however, when he saw the bowl of steaming coffee she had brought with her.

"For the head, *m'sieu,*" she explained, a knowing look in her beady eyes.

How the dickens did she guess his trouble? Swift asked himself. These Frenchies were too much of a puzzle to suit him. He'd be pulling stakes shortly.

"*M'sieu* — plentee 'zig-zag' last night." *Madame* remarked indifferently.

"'Zig-zag?'" asked Swift, who was disposing of the coffee in huge gulps. Already his head felt better.

"*Oui*—plentee whisky," returned the woman. She shook a denouncing finger at him. Her face lit up with mirth.

"You're wrong there, old top," said Swift. "I never touched a drop of anything last night. You know that. Wasn't out of your place either. And you know that, too."

Swift glanced up from his last swallow to see the old woman fairly shaking with laughter.

"So funny!" she repeated over and over, one stubby finger wagging.

Then she proceeded to tell a now curious M'sieu Swift a few things that left his brain only the more muddled.

Had not this same M'sieu Swift kept them waiting up all hours of the night for him? Had not Jean, her husband, threatened many times to close the estaminet doors on him? Had he not come at last like a man from the grave—so white he was? Had he not refused to speak to Jean or Philippe or to *Madame* herself but had gone stamping upstairs, grunting like a pack of pigs, as Jean had said? Where had *M'sieu* got his whisky? Jean would like to know. Jean would put in a barrel, perhaps.

"Wait a minute." Swift threw out an arresting hand. Slowly he straightened up in bed.

With a little shriek of terror *Madame* lifted from her chair as though possessed of wings and fluttered from the room, not stopping until she had placed the door between her and her lodger.

"Well, I'll be damned!" exclaimed Swift. "What's got into her, anyway? Now let's get this business straight. Read for an hour—crawled in about 10. That's the sum total of last night's happenings. Read for an hour—crawled in about 10. Yes, sir, that's all. What's the matter with the old dame, anyway?"

He ran his fingers through his hair. They came away sticky. He inspected them hurriedly.

Blood!

What the devil! He gingerly explored his scalp. There was a gash there—a small one, all clotted over—it might require some attention. Blood on his face? Likely. Some sight, he'd bet. No wonder the old woman scooted for the door. But where on earth had he bumped his head in that fashion?

For one brief moment his dream incident flashed into vision.

"Tommyrot," he snarled. "I'm growing childish—I am." But was it all rot? his conscience questioned. He would see. One bound carried him half-way across the room. Where were his clothes? He had piled them neatly, he remembered, on the solitary table the room claimed. There they were, strewn everywhere about the floor. What? Those rags his?—dirty, mucky things like that? There must be some mistake. He held up his trousers for examination. One leg, from the knee down, hung in tatters.

Swift clapped his hands to his head. "Crazy—crazy!" he mumbled. He found his revolver—heavy with recent rust. He had the clip extracted in a jiffy. "Click-click-click," whispered the cartridges as he thumbed them in his palm.

"Two shells missing? Two vanished overnight?" Why, he had looked over that gun not later than the previous afternoon. Everything had been shipshape then.

Swift sank down upon his bed. The automatic slipped from his fingers to the floor, unheeded. For a long time he sat there, staring straight before him, unbelieving. And many times had Jean to call him before he would appear below at breakfast.

3

CONFLICTING emotions possessed Swift that same afternoon as, accompanied by Jean, he drove away from the estaminet.

He had hesitated to acquaint the innkeeper with the nature of his mission until he had got him away from the influence of his frumpy wife, who, from breakfast on, had everlastingly poked fun at Swift because of his bedraggled clothing and soured expression. Swift felt sure that once

he had Stacquet alone he could convince him there was more behind his last night's adventure, if there had been any adventure (and he doubted it), than a bottle or so of bad liquor and a jealous lover, as *Madame* openly charged.

Just beyond the granite monument at Les Tilleuls corner, Swift drew rein on the pretext of filling his pipe. A hundred yards distant some youngsters were kite-flying. Barring them, the road was deserted.

Swift hopped from the cart. "Come on, Jean," he called. "I'm looking for a soldier, *un soldat Anglais,*" he added as he noted Stacquet's bewildered look. "Yes—a soldier who is every bit as alive as you or I. Very much alive," he laughed, fingering the scalp wound that had been administered but recently.

Stacquet held up his hands in derision. "English soldiers gone—*tout fini*—a long time," he said, grinning.

"That's what I thought," declared Swift, "but there's one of them here yet and he's somewhere round these diggings." Wherewith he proceeded to pour his story into the receptive ears of the Frenchman, who several times during the narrative gazed heavenward and crossed himself most solemnly.

Then they tethered the mule to a second-growth poplar out of the path of Lens-bound motors and struck off across the waste. Past debris of war, defying description, they made their way, till with an exultant cry Swift waved the Frenchman to his side.

Stacquet, hurrying up, found his traveler-guest on his knees. "Here it is—the identical cross—see the wording!" cried Swift. "GORD—that was the inscription—I'm positive. Now let's have a look around."

But the look around brought no further results. After the most careful search Swift was ready to admit that the spot looked as if it had not been visited for ages. Not a single footprint could be found. Swift wondered if it had rained any more during the early morning—if a heavy downpour could have obliterated all such prints. The more he looked the more exasperated he grew until finally with a snarl of "I'm a doggone fool—let's get out," he turned away. "But that's the same cross," he flung back at Jean, whose eyes were fixed in incredulity and who was suggestively tapping his shaven pate with a dirty finger.

The ride back to the estaminet was uneventful. Swift, hunched up in the narrow seat of the cart, rubbing elbows with Jean, rapidly reviewed the situation. Regardless of what might or might not have occurred, the crossroaders would soon consider him fit for the madhouse. He wondered just how short of the mark they were, for he had actually begun to doubt his own powers of reasoning.

All of a sudden there was communicated to his brain a possible explanation of the rôle he had played—if he had played a rôle—in the whole uncanny mess.

"Jean," he asked eagerly, "is there an English doctor in Arras, by any chance? If there is—I think I'd better look him up at once."

But Jean had turned a deaf ear to the inquiry and was hammering his mule with a rawhide, apparently wanting to get home with the least possible delay. He acted like one spiritually afraid.

"Whack-whack" went the rawhide, and "clatter-clatter" went the cart wheels over the cobbled road.

◆

THAT night Swift met the Ancart woman.

He was unaware of her approach till she had whispered directly behind him.

"You are interested in me, *M'sieu?*"

Swift was not thrown off his guard. Calmly he pushed his chair back and turned to meet a pair of attractive eyes from whose depth seemed to flash many tiny darts of animosity.

"Why—interested?" he demanded bluntly.

"You have been watching me for the last half hour. *M'sieu*—in fact since I entered the place—that is why, *M'sieu.*"

"Can I not watch whom I wish?" said Swift, quietly studying the face that looked into his. He was not to be outscored in any duel of badinage—not he. "But to be frank, *Madame*—I presume you are the lovely Madame Ancart—I was more interested in your husband than you."

The girl—for she was little more than a girl—flushed warmly, curtsied, replied with a gay little toss of her head.

"You can be complimentary, *M'sieu.* I apologize—but I regret, nevertheless, your interest was not for me."

"But I am interested," protested Swift, catching at the lace scarf trailing from her trim shoulders. The girl had been about to move away. Now she hesitated, then as the babble of the estaminet rose to a still higher pitch, seated herself on the arm of his chair.

"But why interested in my husband?" she persisted.

"Passing fancy—nothing more," said Swift. "Reminded me of someone I'd met before, I guess."

Ever since the couple had crossed the Stacquet threshold Swift had endeavored to smother curiosity that had filled his thoughts with his first glimpse of the woman's husband.

Of her, during his two weeks' stay at the crossroads, he had learned considerable; of him, virtually nothing. Apparently he figured but little in the life of the community. She had come up from Boulogne early the past spring, bringing her invalid husband with her. The sea air, at Boulogne, she had been told, was not suited to his run-down state of health. A drier climate was preferred. The Vimy Ridge country was quite attractive. She would stay for the summer, perhaps. And they had stayed on.

"No pretty women here, you say," Stacquet had once derided an assertion from Swift. "Just wait, *M'sieu,* till you see Denise Ancart."

And now on seeing this Ancart woman for the first time Swift was willing to acknowledge that Jean had been right. He would even go farther. The Frenchman had not half done her justice. She was beautiful—beautiful beyond words.

Swift's eyes, roaming about the room, fell upon the huddled figure by the door. The long gray coat and soiled *képi* but added to the man's air of absolute dejection. Nodding his way, Swift said:

"Tell me about your husband, *Madame.*"

"It was Verdun, *M'sieu,*" she answered wearily.

"Bad?"

"His hearing, *M'sieu*—and his speech—"

The woman shivered. Swift's big hand crept to hers, tenderly.

"Poor fellow," he said, huskily. "You do need sympathy, little woman."

"*C'est la guerre,*" she said, rising to her feet, and offering a slim, cool hand. "We must be leaving, *M'sieu.*"

"So soon? The night is still early—and you live but across the way." Swift was actually sorry to see her go.

"*Oui, M'sieu,* Émile is growing restless I fear—it is a late hour for Émile."

What Swift had intended to say was cut short by sounds of a commo-

tion. He came to life in time to see Madame Ancart dart from him and thread her way among the roisterers. Swift hoped he might be of some assistance. Struggling, shoving, he elbowed a passage to her side. He found her tugging vainly at her husband's coat. Her husband, backed against the wall, was facing two angry countrymen. Every vestige of depression had fled his appearance. He stood erect, alert, in a position of defense, a good six feet of brawn and muscle. God! what a shame, thought Swift. Such perfect physique to have been blasted by war!

As rapidly as the altercation had flared up it died out. It had occupied no more than a minute, perhaps, but in that brief time Swift's keen gaze had focused on the maimed chap's attitude of defense.

"Regular professional crouch," he remarked to himself. "No French *savate* artist ever taught Ancart that —not by a long shot. You'd have thought he was just whetting for a scrap, crippled as he was. Believe me, there's something mighty peculiar about that fellow, after all. Funny no one knows a thing about him."

Later, Jean Stacquet laughed Swift's deductions to scorn.

"*M'sieu,*" he chided, "has not quite recovered from the little 'zip' he get on the head the first night he come to the crossroads. You think Ancart fooling, eh? *Non, non*—Philippe, there" (he indicated a swarthy fellow whom Swift already knew to be a liar of the first magnitude) "served with Ancart in the *chasseurs*. He know him well. But, *M'sieu,* you play with fire when you play with Denise Ancart. The people see you tonight with her—they do not like anyone to take advantage of an unfortunate *poilu* like Émile. I would warn you, *M'sieu.*"

5

Swift had removed his boots.

His feet made little noise as he climbed the steps, one by one, to their sleeping quarters. The door at the foot of the stairs, whose bulky but ineffective lock he had jimmied, remained open as an aid to retreat should such be necessary.

Off in the distance a dog yapped mournfully, one, twice, was silent. A creepy feeling ran the length of Swift's spine and for a long while he halted there on the stairs where the cur's ominous baying had reached his ears. Then he resumed his climb, blessing his lucky stars when his feet encountered heavy, woolly matting on the landing. The matting would facilitate his approach, but even then his night's job was cut out for him, for by no means was it a delectable mission—that on which he was engaged.

His breathing suppressed, Swift crawled his way, bit by bit, to their door. Ear lowered to the keyhole, he listened attentively. Gradually the drone of conversation within assumed definite and intelligent proportions. Madame Ancart was saying:

"I have had enough of this nonsense." Her words dripped sting. "You must be more cautious henceforth. Or do you wish me to inform? You realize, I suppose, it would be hard for you at this late date to satisfy any investigator? To prove that you did not leave your countrymen intentionally?

"And the penalty for desertion—at least I have been given to understand—is extremely severe, even with your stupid English authorities."

"But, Denise!" The plaintive whimper, Swift fancied, must have issued from the lips of the deaf and dumb Émile. "I should go tonight —I should—"

"*Oui*—you will go—go to your bed," was the reply. Swift heard the man shuffle along the floor within

a few feet of where he crouched. He heard her say:

"And remove that ridiculous uniform. Have I not many times forbidden you to wear it? Have I not ever been patient with you? Did I not bring you here to satisfy your whims? Have you played fair with me? Hardly. Twice this month you have strayed away at night. The ridge is no place for one in your condition, alone. Fortunately I overtook you in time this evening."

"But he is calling—calling for me out there—don't you hear him calling?"

"That's enough, I say. Take off those garments—you will burn them tomorrow. How I hate those English rags anyway!"

"Hate them?"

"*Oui*. Despise them. See—I spit on them. Have you never guessed? Do you think for one minute I took you in to live with me—you, a crazy man—for such love as you could give me? Eda Reinhardt has been too long accustomed to the costliest and finest to care for one of your country. *Gott strafe England!*"

Swift heard the woman laugh contemptuously.

"Imbecile," she continued, "you have kept me very much amused—very! Did you not know that all the time I made love to you, I picked from you the information so valued by our intelligence? You never dreamed your little Denise so clever? *Non?* You never knew Berlin could pay big money to clever little French girls like Eda Reinhardt? *Non?* Do not look so surprized—so hurt—*mon mari*. There is no need for worry concerning me. Next week I return to Berlin. Once the French government would have paid big rewards for Eda's head, but she slipped them by. The war is long passed now, and they have forgotten. Three years I have waited to make sure—that they might not trip me up. Next week I go back to my own people."

"Oh, my God!" rang Émile's cry.

Suddenly it all came back to Swift, listening by the door. Could this man within be his challenger chap? His would-be murderer of a fortnight back? Was it possible?

The ring of some delicate metal against glass.

"No threats, Émile,—roll up your sleeve," Swift heard the woman command. "You are upset again tonight. Forget that dead man of yours. This will help you to forget. This will take the pain from your head—it is good for you."

"I will not have it," came the refusal.

"Do as I say. Bare your arm."

Swift altered his position slightly; squirmed down, cautiously, until his eye at the keyhole commanded partial observation of the scene being enacted within. What he glimpsed stirred his indignation to the full. His muscles tightened, it seemed, to a point nigh breaking.

He watched the wreck of a man—Ancart, dressed fully in once-familiar khaki—his midnight man of the battle wastes—the identical person (he was certain of it)—extend his arms in a helpless manner. He saw Madame Ancart, pale and hard-eyed with suppressed anger, bend over the fellow where he reclined on a small couch, and work deftly with a tiny syringe. He saw, almost felt, the hypodermic needle plunged into naked flesh. He heard the heavy breathing of the unwilling patient; saw the man's chin drop lower and lower as his chest heaved less and less; saw the gaunt frame writhe slightly, then relax.

"The last tablet—I must be careful from now on," he heard the woman say pitilessly.

"You're damned right you must!" Swift heard himself shout. His voice rang through and through the build-

ing and echoed from the house-walls on the street without.

"Oh you she-devil—I'll make you settle for this!" he roared, grabbing the knob and throwing all his weight against the door. "I'm coming in!" he shouted at the top of his lungs. "I'm—coming—"

6

Some terrific pressure was holding him down; was crushing the life from him. Could he throw it off? Fight—fight—there he was slipping from the coils—one last lunge—he was free—free—*smash!*

Swift's head came in violent contact with a solid bit of masonry. Something snapped within him, leaving him as weak as a kitten. He found himself staring at a rude doorknob about which his hands were clenched in a grip unbreakable.

Why—where was he?

Into whose abode had his somnambulism carried him this time? Why had he trusted that Arras doctor who had assured him that return to him at middle age of the unfortunate ailment of his youth was out of the question, that the idea was absurd?

But it was too late now.

"I'll have to see the blamed business through," he said to himself. "Let me in there—let me in there! I demand it!" he blustered, pummeling the door with his fists.

A catlike step in his rear. Swift swung round quickly to confront a gleaming bull's eye lantern and behind it the sturdy figure of a gendarme.

"I thought I heard a cry—then I found the house open," explained the latter, "and suspected something might be out of place."

"And just in time," a cool voice interpolated. The door had opened slightly, unobserved. The face of the Ancart woman peered from the aperture. "It isn't often," she said, "that the privacy of my dwelling is disturbed by such noisy wretches."

"You're not putting anything over on me," Swift interposed. "She's killing a man in there," he declared, turning to the officer.

"I have no idea why he should select this place to rob," calmly returned the woman. "We are poor, as you know."

"Rubbish," snorted Swift. He thrust one arm between the door and the jamb and catapulted himself past the woman into the room. In a far corner stood a bed, and to all appearances sleeping peacefully on it, stretched Émile, her husband. He was undressed. Then for the first time Swift noticed that *Madame* was clad but lightly too.

Had his devilish sleep-walking played hob with him again? If so what a ridiculous situation in which to be discovered! What would he do? What could he do?

Up the stairs stamped a clump of excited villagers. They, too, they said, had heard cries. As Swift debated his plans, his brain seeking here and there for some loophole of inspiration, he suddenly spotted one of Ancart's arms protruding from beneath the bed clothing. He was over it in an instant. From the near-by table he caught up the lamp. He examined the flesh closely. Those little punctures—could they be—?

Glancing around, he noted the tremor at the woman's throat, the slight curling back of her lips.

A sweep of the gendarme's arm hurled him speechless against the wall.

"Well, officer," Madame Ancart diffidently remarked, again mistress of herself, "I detest notoriety but I can not remain here in the cold any longer. I see I have to explain and I shall do so. M'sieu Swift, I regret to say, entered this house tonight, for no other reason, I can gather, than to

molest me. Since we first met he has ever troubled me. At the estaminet, but recently, he made passionate love to me—threatened me, unless—"

"*Madame* speaks the truth," enjoined one of the audience. "I happened to be at Stacquet's that evening." Swift recognized the impossible Philippe as the damaging witness.

"You liar!" he breathed intensely.

"See that," declared the woman. "How long, officer, need we put up with such insults?"

A murmur of strong disapproval welled up from the spectators. Various suggestions were advanced. "Get him off quickly," appeared to be the consensus. Swift wondered if he could make a break for it, but the gendarme's burly figure completely blocked the stairway.

"How long will it take you to pack up?" asked the limb of the law, finally. Swift did not reply. "Well—there's a train leaves Aubigny at 9 in the morning. I'll have Stacquet drive you over—if he will. You had better take that train."

Swift shot a last glance at the recumbent form of Ancart and went wearily down the stairs.

7

THE first gray streaks of dawn were faintly showing. Swift moved uneasily in the cart. Some thought was stirring deep within him, pleading for utterance.

Far-away strains of music reached his ears. Soft and mellow was the voice. That voice again—or was it? They were just opposite the Ancart home.

. . . . . when the lights are low,
And the flickering shadows . . . . .

Swift stared hard at the top-story window of the place where something white moved behind the stained glass; seemed to be signaling him. By heavens! Someone *was* singing there. That was where the voice came from. It was the crazy chap.

"They're not going to pull the wool over my eyes any longer," raged Swift. "Stop this blasted wagon—"

Shuddering, Swift opened his eyes and found Stacquet clutching his arm in a viselike grip. The Frenchman gave him a bad look.

"Next time," he admonished, "I won't catch you. Twice since we start I stop you from falling out on to the road. Be patient till you reach the station. You may sleep there as you will."

NOTE. — The following excerpt from *The Warrior* was clipped since the receipt of Mr. Oliver's manuscript:

In the spring of 1917, somewhere in France, Private James White, Canadian Infantry, was reported wounded. Immediately thereafter his name vanished from the records, and in spite of a strenuous search instituted by his father, Mr. William White, of Montreal, which was ably seconded by British and French authorities, his disappearance remained an absolute mystery until recently.

A cable from White's parents, now in France, announces the discovery of their son's remains.

Official records always had it that Private John Gordie, an intimate friend of White, was killed at the same time White received his wounds. Acting on the theory that some mistake had been made, the latter's father, with the consent of the Graves and Burial Commission, had the supposed Gordie body exhumed. There was no difficulty in identifying the body as that of Private James White.

It will be recalled that White and Gordie attended the same school, enlisted together, went to France with the same unit and fell in the same engagement.

But the recent identification of White's body merely shifts the mystery to young Gordie, who, it now appears, was the man to go down the line a casualty, and who figured in the derailment of the hospital train on the outskirts of the city of Boulogne. From that moment on, all his movements are lost.

Forty Nights of Terror Brought Dire Consequences to James Blake

The HOUR *of* DEATH

By GROVER BRINKMAN

THE telephone on Dr. Thorndyke's littered desk shrieked a single jerked-out ring, as if the party on the other end of the line was nervous for a connection to be made. Laying aside his book, he casually reached for the receiver.

"Hello!" he said. "Yes, this is Thorndyke speaking. Who did you say? Blake? Oh yes, I recognize your voice now, old man—didn't at first, it seemed so strained and unnatural. Yes, if you say it's urgent I'll be over right away."

Thorndyke hung up the receiver, donned his hat and coat and went out the front way of his bachelor apartment, telling his servant he need not stay up. A minute later he was speeding down the deserted street in his own roadster.

"Now I wonder what in the dickens is the matter?" Thorndyke reflected as he sped along, recalling the strained, terrified voice of his old colleague over the wire.

He was soon to find out. As he parked his car in Blake's driveway, he had a vague premonition that something was wrong — seriously wrong. A servant met him at the door of Blake's residence, an old, slightly bent man who led him without prelude to Blake's den, where his friend lived alone.

But what a different Blake! In the strained, horror-filled face, Thorndyke could hardly recognize the man who from youth and college days he always called his closest friend. Blake was a strong man, both mentally and physically, his only weakness a belief in superstition, and as Thorndyke looked at this mere phantom of the former football star, the frown deepened on his brow.

"Thank God — I'm glad you came!" said Blake unnaturally. "It was so late when I called up that I was afraid you might have retired."

"No, I most always stay up till after midnight, reading. But you look as if you've seen a ghost—what in the world is wrong?"

For answer Blake pointed to a library table in the center of the room, on which was a scattered pile of letters. He seemed stupefied; his eyes were glassy and wandering.

"Read one of those," he said queerly, "and don't take it as a joke. For the last six weeks one of those letters has been coming—at 1 o'clock in the morning each time."

Thorndyke, his face incredulous, picked up the foremost letter and unfolded the single sheet it contained. As he read, the blood slowly left his face, and laughing queerly, he read for the second time the brief note:

Mr. James Blake:
Two more nights from tonight—at exactly 1 o'clock—and your life will be snuffed out like the breaking of a thread.

There was no signature—nothing at all—nothing but that sinister message without a clue of any kind.

Blake gave a hollow laugh. "What do you make of it?" he asked slowly, hopelessly.

Thorndyke shook his head; then presently his face broke into the image of a smile. "No doubt some friend of yours trying to put a scare into you," he said, though his voice lacked conviction.

"I've thought of that. At first I almost believed it, but I don't any more. Why, man, look—more than forty of them! Every night for forty nights—*at exactly 1 o'clock!*"

Thorndyke was looking through the letters, trying to conjure some vague reason for their being there. "Can't you get a clue from the postmarks?" he asked presently.

"No use to try," Blake returned. "Each is mailed within the city, though not always at the same station, and each has a special delivery stamp attached. We can't find a clue that way."

SUDDENLY, as Thorndyke started to speak, the tall clock in the hallway chimed out the hour—1 o'clock! With the sound, Blake seemed to pale even more—until his face was the color of dead ashes. He slumped down in his chair, trembling in every limb, his eyes in a fixed stare on the doorway. Thorndyke realized with a pang of regret that the sinister letters were proving too much for his old friend. Blake was a wreck, physically and mentally, and to all indications on the verge of losing his mind.

"Buck up, old man," he said solicitously.

"But my God, Jim!" almost shrieked Blake, his outward calm suddenly deserting him; "place yourself in my position. For more than forty nights I've stayed up and waited—waited—for this! I can't sleep—all day and night this thing haunts me like a bad dream. My mind is about ready to snap. Thank God it's almost over—either we find out who's doing this tomorrow night or I——"

He broke off abruptly. At that moment the aged servant noiselessly opened the door, and without further ceremony handed Blake a letter.

"Special delivery letter for you, sir," he said obediently, his face an impassive mask, and turned for the door.

Blake turned the letter over in his hands like a man in a daze. Without opening it, he handed it to Thorndyke. "You read it," he requested, and buried his face in his hands.

Thorndyke took it without a word of protest and tore it open. This time the message was even more brief:

Twenty-four more hours—and then the breaking of the thread.

As he put the letter on the table, the expression of Thorndyke's face suddenly changed; his countenance hardened, his lips drew into a thin line that barely showed the whiteness of his teeth, and his eyes seemed to be visioning something far away.

"Blake," he said determinedly, "we're going to find out who is doing this—and don't think about tomorrow night. Have you any idea what the motive of sending these crazy letters could be?"

"No, I haven't," said Blake hopelessly. "I'm pretty well provided for financially, but not rich—it's not a scheme to blackmail me for money, I'm sure of that—and I don't know of any enemies here in New York."

"How about your servant?" suddenly asked Thorndyke.

Blake laughed. "Nothing suspicious about him—I've had him for the last ten years. He thinks the letters are from my factory superintendent out of town—a daily report of the work."

"All right," said Thorndyke, "I suppose in that case you can trust him. I think I'll be going now—there's nothing to be gained by your sitting up and racking your brain about it. You go to bed and sleep and forget all about this. I'll come tomorrow night—before 1 o'clock—and we'll see what happens."

Leaving a sleeping potion, he left, advising the old servant to see that Blake had every care.

All that day Thorndyke thought about the coming night. Toward evening he had a visitor in the form of Inspector Carson, who though ten years his senior, was one of his closest friends, and also an intimate friend of Blake. Acting on an impulse, he told Carson all about the threats Blake had received, his condition, and asked him to go along that night. Carson accepted, and he promised to call for him at midnight.

At 11 o'clock that night Thorndyke had a call. One of his convalescing suburban patients had grown suddenly worse; they asked him to come immediately. After telephoning Carson, telling him he might be a few minutes late, Thorndyke left without delay.

Although he worked with all possible haste over his patient, and left the sickroom as soon as he dared, it was fifteen minutes of 1 when he drew up in front of Carson's apartment.

"We'll have to hurry," he said nervously, as Carson took his seat beside him. "I'm sure the letters and threats are a fake, but nevertheless I'd like to be there a minute before 1 o'clock—Blake's the next thing to being insane now, and you can't tell what some little scare might do."

It was only a few minutes later when they slowed up for Blake's residence. As they turned into the dark driveway that wound serpentlike to the house situated far back from the street, Carson suddenly gave a warning cry as a fleeing figure jumped directly into the path of the car.

Thorndyke jammed on the brakes, but it was too late to avoid striking the man. With a sickening sensation in the pit of his stomach, he climbed out of the machine. Carson was already bending over the prostrate form, and it was with a profound shock that he recognized the bent form as that of Blake's servant.

It was obvious that the man's condition was critical, though he still retained consciousness, and as he bent over him, Thorndyke saw the pale lips move as if he wanted to speak. A sip of brandy from his first-aid kit seemed to revive him for a moment, and he began to talk.

"Listen," he began brokenly, just above a whisper. "I'm about gone—so it'll be just as well if I tell you something." He stopped a minute, as if gathering strength to go on. Then: "I — was the one — who — wrote those letters to—to Blake. I wanted to make him suffer. Years ago Blake was the cause of my—daughter's disgrace. I promised her I would make him pay—and I did. He's been in hell for the last six weeks. I—never—intended to—kill him. Wanted to make him suffer. Better go up to the—house——"

The voice ceased; the aged servant lapsed into unconsciousness. Shuddering slightly, Thorndyke gently laid back the tousled head, and with Carson at his side started for the house.

As he pushed open the front door, the clock in the hallway struck the hour—1 o'clock! The deep chime seemed to send an icy shiver through his body, and he saw that Carson was pale also. With the chime also was a sound that he could not fathom—

something like a low, deep moan. The next moment he pushed open the library door, Carson at his back.

THORNDYKE gave a gasp at what he saw, and he felt the blood suddenly chill in his veins. Blake was crumpled in a heap on the floor, where he had fallen face forward out of his chair! Springing forward, Thorndyke quickly felt the stricken man's pulse, then placed his ear over his heart. The next moment he looked up with a tragic face to encounter the troubled gaze of Carson.

"We were a minute too late," said Thorndyke slowly, brokenly. "He's dead. Died of fright."

The Haunted Palace

By EDGAR ALLAN POE

(Reprint)

In the greenest of our valleys,
By good angels tenanted,
Once a fair and stately palace—
Radiant palace—reared its head.
In the monarch Thought's dominion
It stood there!
Never seraph spread a pinion
Over fabric half so fair!

Banners yellow, glorious, golden,
On its roof did float and flow
(This—all this—was in the olden
Time long ago),
And every gentle air that dallied
In that sweet day,
Along the ramparts plumed and pallid,
A wingèd odor went away.

Wanderers in that happy valley
Through two luminous windows saw
Spirits moving musically
To a lute's well-tunèd law,
Round about a throne where, sitting
(Porphyrogene!)
In state his glory well befitting,
The ruler of the realm was seen.

And all with pearl and ruby glowing
Was the fair palace door,
Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing,
And sparkling evermore,
A troop of Echoes, whose sweet duty
Was but to sing,
In voices of surpassing beauty,
The wit and wisdom of their king.

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
Assailed the monarch's high estate.
(Ah, let us mourn!—for never morrow
Shall dawn upon him desolate!)
And round about his home the glory
That blushed and bloomed
Is but a dim-remembered story
Of the old time entombed.

And travelers, now, within that valley,
Through the red-litten windows see
Vast forms, that move fantastically
To a discordant melody,
While, like a ghastly rapid river,
Through the pale door
A hideous throng rush out for ever
And laugh—but smile no more.

The Story So Far

The *Sphere*, a strange aircraft which defies gravity because of the use of an element known as *mythonite*, starts on a voyage to explore the planet Mars. In it are Professor Bernard Palmer, his protege Robert Sprague, and a stowaway reporter named Hugh Taggert, of *The Chronicle*. In twelve days they have covered more than half the distance between Earth and Mars, and are hurtling with tremendous speed toward their destination.

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THE thirteenth "day" saw them nearing Mars rapidly. The ruddy-hued planet gleamed at them with magnificent brilliance, its cold glitter thrilling them and filling them with vague misgivings.

At this distance it became apparent that Professor Palmer's feverishly corrected course would carry the *Sphere* at least several thousand miles ahead of the planet. This variation was to be expected, however; the miracle of it was that he had been able to judge direction so closely in those few nerve-racking and never-to-be-forgotten moments in the reeling *Sphere*.

Fearing to disturb the steady course and velocity of the *Sphere*, and content so long as they were still nearing the planet, they made no effort to utilize the disk's power yet. Professor Palmer estimated that they were approaching Mars at a rate of 100,000 miles an hour. Already they were within some 3,000,000 miles of it, compared with the original distance of roughly 35,000,000 miles.

Brighter and brighter shone the mysterious planet with the passage of each watch. With the rapid reduction of the intervening distance, a faint restoration of gravitation began to be felt. Even in this extremely weak form it proved a very welcome relief to the weary Spherites. No longer did they float about like gas-filled balloons, though walking was still a difficult feat.

The beginning of the fourteenth "day" found them within a few hundred thousand miles of Mars. The *Sphere's* course had now mechanically corrected itself as anticipated by the professor, and they were "falling" directly toward the planet. All eyes were now kept eagerly trained upon it through the observation well. Its spreading disk almost entirely filled the glass-enclosed tube. The professor watched it with boyish ex-

citement, as feature after feature developed with their swift approach.

Indeed, the planet presented an awe-inspiring and wonderful sight.

Its great, snow-white polar caps, and vast, rose, rich ocher and purplish-bronze expanses between these caps surpassed in grandeur anything their eyes had ever beheld. Crossing and recrossing these expanses or plains was a curious network of straight and some slightly curved, dark-hued lines. All of these lines appeared to originate at the edges of the polar caps, or to connect indirectly with them by means of juncture with other lines. The northern or smaller cap was surrounded by a border of deep, bluish tint. This cap had shrunken noticeably even during their recent observation. Professor Palmer attributed this phenomenon to the advanced summer in the northern hemisphere, accompanied by a melting of that polar cap and an accumulation of water around it from which the "canals" were fed.

At numerous junctures dark spots occurred. The whole presented much the appearance of a crude map, upon a globe, of some gigantic railroad system, the dots representing the terminals or large cities. Several of the lines were double, running parallel with startling regularity and joining together again at the terminals. The northern extremities of the "canals" were now plainly darker than elsewhere, and strengthened the professor's well-known theories regarding the purpose of the "canals."

Another outstanding feature was certain large, bluish-green blotches interrupting the general rose-and-ocher hue of the plains. Some of the lines ended in these blotches. Wherever this occurred there was a caret-shaped junction, the line connecting directly at the point of the caret. At this point the color was deepest; from there it faded, gradually changing in color, the blotch blending into the ocher plain.

All of these features stood out in increasing vividness as the strange planet drew nearer, proving that the Martian atmosphere contained little or no moisture in the form of clouds. With the further expansion of the surface beneath them, new and fainter lines were discovered. The great disk had by this time grown so large that its outer edges could be viewed readily from the sloping ports.

The professor compared painstakingly the actual features of the planet before him with his own maps of it, the result of years of faithful observation and study at the lonely California observatory, that an ever-skeptical world might be further enlightened. The sight of him poring intently over his maps and notes, oblivious for the while of all else, was not without a certain pathos. At last, he stood at the threshold of vindication.

"Gosh," ejaculated the red-head, breaking a long silence with startling abruptness, "I hope we don't drop into that snow on the north pole there."

"We can land at any point we prefer, old man," Robert assured him.

"That happens to be the south pole, my friends," said the professor, referring to the large polar cap over the edge of which the *Sphere* then hung. "See, the planet has been turning this way—toward what we shall call the east, which makes this pole the south."

"Give me the desert," replied Taggert, indulging in the luxury of a shiver.

"From the looks of things," said Robert, "we shall have all the desert we want. That ocher shade seems entirely too popular. It makes me thirsty to look at it."

The gyrostats had been started again for safety as they drew near

the planet, and the *Sphere's* comet-like velocity retarded by cautiously focusing the disk in the opposite direction temporarily.

A deflection of the disk swung the *Sphere* away from the pole and nearer the Martian equator. With the possibility of landing within a few hours, a keen watch was kept for the most promising region in which to land.

"If our belief that Mars is inhabited be correct," said Robert, "it may be well to avoid the population centers. The Martians may fear that we are seeking to do them harm with some machine of destruction, and destroy us."

"That's a good suggestion," exclaimed Taggert. "It would be just like one of those dudes to take a crack at us with some kind of a howitzer for luck."

"Let us first fly over the surface at a safe height and examine it carefully, then select a landing site," suggested Professor Palmer. "If it seems to be inhabited we had best land outside some smaller village where we will have an opportunity to interview a few of the natives without so much danger of being overpowered if they prove antagonistic."

Sluggishly, the vast map slid westward before their gaze, in panoramic review as the planet rotated in its axis. Thus its entire surface from pole to pole was gradually presented to their view as they continued to descend at a considerably reduced speed.

The fifteenth "day" found them within about 25,000 miles of the planet's surface. At this elevation Professor Palmer commenced a sharp lookout for the two moons which were known to revolve about Mars at great speed. These moons had been glimpsed on rare occasions by a few of the earth's astronomers through powerful telescopes, but only when conditions for observation had been ideal. Professor Palmer had seen them more than once, although they were each approximately but ten miles in diameter, as he explained to Robert and Taggert.

"Ten miles?" repeated Taggert, doubtfully. "Why—dammit, these blamed Martian moons aren't much more than balls of mud! Say, I'd rather have our moon than half a dozen like those. Ours is more than 2,000 miles in diameter, isn't it?"

"You must remember that the Earth's moon is about 240,000 miles away from it, while Mars' nearest moon is only about 3,700 miles above its surface."

"How high is the other one?"

"Approximately 13,000 miles; but it is doubtful whether it would be visible to the naked eye from Mars—certainly not plainly. The one nearer Mars, however, should present an interesting spectacle from that planet. It requires eleven hours to cross Mars' heavens, by reason of the moon's own swift revolution and the slower rotation of Mars, going through all its phases and half again during that time."

"It's odd that it doesn't fall into the planet from that height," said Robert.

"Rapid revolution in its orbit round Mars produces sufficient centrifugal force to balance the planet's attraction," said Professor Palmer. "The same principle is involved as in the swinging of a pail of water over one's head without spilling it. Yet, some day one of these moons may be drawn into the planet. Should that happen, the blow may be great enough to change the planet's own orbit."

"How about landing on one of these moons?" said Robert.

"Ha! Novel thought, that," exploded Taggert. "Say, if we'd play catchers on it, we would be apt to run right off."

"I don't think catchers would be a very good game to play on these moons," chuckled Professor Palmer. "You see, a person wouldn't weigh much more than a feather on one of them, and if he took a real good leap on the under side he might find himself on his way to Mars. Not only that; there is no atmosphere on them, and you could not exist an instant in the vacuum and intense cold prevailing there, even if you were equipped with respiration tanks."

"That's enough for me," Taggert decided with a grimace.

"How cold do you think it is out in space like that?" asked Robert.

"Absolute zero—the nadir of temperature—is said to be 459 degrees below zero Fahrenheit."

"Enough, enough," shouted Taggert. "I said I was satisfied without getting out on a moon."

"There's Deimos over there now," cried the professor suddenly, pointing.

"Don't know the lady," commented the reporter. Nevertheless he looked interestedly, and a trifle uneasily in the direction indicated.

"Deimos, or 'Fear,' is the moon farthest from Mars; Phobus, meaning 'Panic,' is the other," the professor explained.

Off toward the northwest, just beyond the outer rim of the planet, a small star was suspended. It appeared much like any ordinary star in spite of its small bulk, for it was much closer than the vastly larger stars which we are accustomed to see.

"Now we must keep clear of that one, and watch closely for the other," cautioned Professor Palmer.

At an elevation of about 3,000 miles nothing of the other moon had been seen, and it was concluded that it was then on the opposite side of the planet. But they were soon to find out their mistake—one that nearly proved fatal.

It happened while all three were intent upon the nearing planet, which presented a sight of such interest that even Professor Palmer had temporarily forgotten his own recent warning.

Their sole warning was a sudden cessation of the sun's rays. Darkness reigned, except for the reflection from the Martian disk below. The abruptness of it made them gasp in unreasoning terror.

Above and around them the blackness of space was unbroken. The sun seemed simply to have gone out completely. Only the vivid sight of Mars reassured them.

"The moon!" yelled Taggert, first to think of it.

Hard on the heels of the realization of what had caused the sudden darkness came to Robert and Professor Palmer the knowledge that the satellite must be dangerously close to them. Otherwise, its small diameter would not have so completely hidden the sun from them. Passing between them and the sun, there was no longer danger of its crashing into them, but it was not entirely improbable that it might attract the *Sphere* toward it, with disastrous results.

Almost the next instant they were plunged again into the joyous rays of the sun. All of this had happened in a few seconds' time, but to their startled minds it had seemed much longer. Looking up furtively they had glimpsed, for just a moment, a slice of blackness slipping from the edge of the sun. The miniature satellite had passed from their vision into the sightless black background of space. But, no; there *was* something there!

The reflection from Mars produced a barely perceptible glow upon the jagged face of the big ball above them. It reminded Robert exactly of the faint, broken reflection of lantern light on the ceiling of a large

chamber in a cave which he had once explored. There was something threatening and terrifying about the rapidly dissolving apparition.

"I've seen enough of that baby," sighed Taggert. "Oy, let's go down on Mars and meet some nice, fresh cannibals before we hook up with another one of those things."

"As a matter of fact, my esteemed friend, we are still scurrying toward yon cannibalistic region to the tune of some thousand miles an hour," volunteered Robert, adopting Taggert's vernacular.

The curious lines and dots now stood out vividly on the ocher-tinted background. So obviously of artificial origin did they appear that neither Taggert nor Robert entertained any further doubts as to the planet's being inhabited. Soon they were all three engrossed in a discussion concerning the probable appearance of these remarkable people, who were engaged in a desperate struggle for life against the waning of their world.

"I think they are a race of giants, because no people of ordinary strength could succeed in constructing such a vast system of canals," Taggert suggested.

"I've heard it claimed that the Martians are probably a race of smaller stature than ourselves, in proportion to the size of their planet," said Robert.

"On the other hand, I think it quite probable," said the professor, "that these people are much like ourselves, in size as well as formation. That they possess extraordinary intelligence I feel certain, for they are a far older race than our own, and their wits have doubtless been sharpened by their ceaseless combat with nature."

"Then you believe that their unusual skill, and not physical strength, has enabled them to achieve these wonderful feats?"

"Not entirely. The force of gravity at the surface of Mars is approximately but three-eighths of that on the Earth. The result is that a being of our strength on Mars would be capable of about seven times as much work as on Earth. For example, he could dig a trench on Mars seven times as long as he could one of the same size on the Earth in the same length of time. The weight of the soil, of his arms and body, would be much less than on Earth, and the ratio of his strength over the reduced task would be augmented greatly.

"Then again, haunted, century after century, by the specter of extinction, the Martians would doubtless invent all manner of marvelous contrivances for the accomplishment of their gigantic tasks. Necessity has probably goaded them to a frenzy of invention and research."

"Don't you think it more likely that the 'canals' are really giant underground ducts? I should think long, open waterways would allow most of the water to evaporate before it had reached the ends," said Taggert.

"I do. However, the popular conception of the word 'canal,' is that of an open waterway, whereas any duct, passage or groove, may properly be termed a canal."

"But such canals or tubes would not be visible from the Earth, surely," reasoned Taggert.

"Certainly not; but the vegetation which they fed *would* be. That is evidently why, with the melting of the polar caps, the lines have been observed to deepen in color with the season. I believe this indicates the quickening of the growths in the strips of irrigated ground along the 'canals,' the rate of progression observed being about fifty-one miles a day."

"How do you account for that? Gravity could scarcely be responsible, for there would be no more reason to expect all water to run from the poles to the equator on Mars than to expect the same thing to happen on Earth."

"Exactly. The Martians must have some unusual method of pumping the water through these canals."

Robert, who had often discussed these details with Professor Palmer during the past months, was more interested right then in the probable characteristics of animal life on the planet, and particularly the people. Were they brown-skinned or white, hairy or smooth, with features like our own, or different? He had not forgotten his curious vision of the Martian desert, nor the spell cast over him by the maiden in his dream. *She* had been neither brown nor ugly. He wished earnestly that the Martians would be like her. These were the thoughts that ran through his mind as he watched the vast fairyland developing beneath him.

By this time the planet's disk had spread until it formed a low horizon on all sides. Although they were less than a thousand miles distant, the planet's surface still appeared to be quite level. No indication of mountain ranges could they detect from this height. At an elevation of about three hundred miles Robert checked the velocity of the *Sphere* further for fear of excessive atmospheric friction. For they should soon be entering the outer edge of the planet's envelope of gases.

The poles were no longer visible, being lost beyond the rising horizon, as the *Sphere* was now almost directly over the equator. The planet continued to revolve before their eyes. So long as the *Sphere* remained beyond the envelope of atmosphere, they were independent of Mars' rotation.

"Better follow the spin of the planet now, Robert," said Professor Palmer.

A deflection of the disk soon gave them the desired easterly drift. Gradually, the vast panorama beneath them came to rest.

As they continued to descend, a slight glow began to replace the blackness of space. This indicated the presence of some atmosphere round them. At this point they observed the first sign of vapor upon Mars. A solitary patch of opalescence partly covered one edge of a large, dull-green blotch a little to the northeast of them.

Here and there a certain roughness about the surface of the planet seemed to represent slightly hilly regions, but such places were scarce. The planet's predominating characteristic appeared to be a monotonous flatness.

The "canals" had now become broad, bluish-green bands, terminating in large circular areas of a similar shade. Robert could almost imagine he saw tree-tops.

Little was said as the *Sphere* approached the planet's surface. Each was thrilled with his own imagination and excitement over the immediate prospect of viewing, at close range, the mysterious planet which had so long baffled the experts of the world. Robert retained perfect, skilful control of the *Sphere*, aided by advice from Professor Palmer as the latter studied the distant Martian landscape intently. Taggert busied himself making notes.

The sky had now taken on a normal glow like that of the Earth's, and for the first time they felt that they were finally and definitely within the boundaries of the Martian world. The character in detail of the country below was now faintly visible. The earlier suggestion of some moderately hilly regions was emphasized by the setting sun, a low,

but rugged, ridge appearing off toward the northwest. It was plain that if they wished to land by daylight there was little time to lose.

There was no longer any doubt as to the artificial character of the planet. One of the great "oases" extended toward the northeast to the now restricted horizon. From this, and almost directly beneath them, ran a broad belt of mottled green, continuing toward the southwest till lost to view.

The altimeter now registered 60,000 feet. However, they were, no doubt, much closer to the surface than this, as the atmospheric pressure on Mars was certain to be considerably less than that on Earth; in fact, their height did not appear half that great.

"Not much choice about a landing point," commented Taggert. "This country looks more like the Sahara every minute."

Indeed, there was an uninviting monotony about the landscape. With exception of the dark belt, and the oasis on the horizon, the entire country seemed one vast desert. The *Sphere* drifted slowly, as Robert had now checked its descent almost entirely.

"I think we had best land about five miles beyond the canal belt," said Professor Palmer. "We ought to be safe there from any sudden attack, should the inhabitants prove hostile. More likely we will there be visited by a cautious few where both parties will have an opportunity to look each other over carefully before making any overtures."

This seeming a sound piece of advice, the *Sphere* was steered several miles to the north of the belt. Here Robert allowed it to settle slowly.

The sun was sinking into the horizon even as the *Sphere* came to rest in the loose, yellow sand of the desert, about two hundred miles south of the equator. The trip to Mars was a reality!

11

"HURRAH we're here!" shouted Taggert, executing a handspring, and narrowly missing the incandescents in the ceiling because of his unaccustomed light weight.

Robert and Professor Palmer accepted their triumph more quietly.

To Robert the remarkable trip already seemed as a nightmare. As he looked out on the quiet, desolate scene in the deepening twilight, he could scarcely realize that they were not still on the Earth. For despite the desolation of the vast Martian desert stretching before his eyes, and the fact that he had never before even seen a desert except in pictures, his imagination balked when he tried to believe himself on a strange planet, millions of miles from the Earth. The idea was preposterous, absurd! Robert's more deliberate self persisted in half suspecting that they had simply miscalculated, and had actually returned to the Earth at some remote spot.

"Boys, I'm going to try a whiff of our new atmosphere," said the professor, unlatching one of the small portholes.

Before either of the others could interfere, he had swung the heavy glass slightly inward, and sniffed the Martian atmosphere speculatively.

Whatever fears they held were quickly dispelled by the look of relief which came over Professor Palmer's countenance as he swung the port wide open and eagerly inhaled the outside atmosphere.

"It's all right," he cried. "The regular stuff! Come on and enjoy some fresh, Martian desert air."

Robert and Taggert did not need to be urged. The air within the *Sphere* seemed suddenly to have grown unbearably stale. With one accord they opened the other ports

and filled their lungs with the sweet, cold air outside.

"We'll have to close up again to keep warm tonight," shivered Taggert.

"Thirty-four degrees above zero," read Robert from the Fahrenheit thermometer outside.

"The air on these deserts cools very rapidly after twilight," said the professor. "Even in the Sahara, on our own globe, the temperature frequently drops below freezing at night. However, the temperature in the canal belts should be more uniform."

"Let's get outside and look around a bit," suggested Robert.

"Good idea," echoed the reporter. "I'd like to see what some of these oafs look like."

"Not likely to be any of them strolling around in the desert at night," said Robert.

"Can't tell; I'll bet they didn't fail to see the *Sphere* when we slid over here. We're likely to have an army down on us tonight."

"I wouldn't worry about that," said Professor Palmer. "The Martians are obviously a people of much intelligence. I expect they will act just about as our own people would, should some curious machine land upon the Earth. They will probably wait till daylight, then come out and satisfy their curiosity."

"And ours," added Robert, remembering his dream.

As they stepped out upon the sand, buttoned into warm coats, a brilliant spectacle was presented to their gaze.

Low in the southeast Phobus hung like a glowing orange. Its now apparently smooth, bright disk was a decided contrast to the dark, threatening, cavernous face which had frightened them but a few hours earlier. All round them the indigo sky was studded with stars of the great brilliance that is reserved for travelers of the deserts. Behind them the comfortable flood of illumination from the *Sphere* spread its friendly radiance over the sand.

"Look over there!" cried Taggert suddenly, pointing toward the east.

Far away on the horizon's edge a diffused white glow shone steadily.

"A city," guessed Robert quickly.

"A group of cities—a Martian oasis," suggested the professor.

"Why, there are some lights along the canal, too," said Robert, becoming aware of a number of lights stretching along the endless strip of fertile land to the south of them.

"Well, I'll be damned!" cried Taggert. "Say, let's run over to town tonight!"

But however sanguine the professor might have been regarding the existence of an intelligent race upon the planet, he balked at a precipitate invasion of their haunts right then. So it was decided to wait till morning for developments.

The lantern which Robert carried was almost superfluous in the bright starlight. They enjoyed the novelty of trudging about through the sand, after their extended confinement within the *Sphere*. In spite of the looseness and depth of the sand, they walked over it with amazing ease because of the decreased gravity on the smaller planet. Robert, for example, who weighed 150 pounds on earth, now weighed less than sixty pounds. Yet he retained his full strength, so that the task of walking was tremendously reduced.

"Run you a race, Robert," called Taggert, starting out abruptly at a great pace.

The temptation was too great. Robert was a good runner and reveled in the sport. He dashed after the reporter.

His feet scarcely seemed to touch the sand as he raced after the fleeting shadow ahead of him. With giant

strides, twenty feet long, he steadily reduced the distance between them.

Suddenly there came a dim shout ahead, followed by a dull thud—then, silence.

Robert slowed up as quickly as possible and looked round him. The reporter had disappeared!

Far in the rear the *Sphere* shone brightly, like a beacon. Between it and himself he could see the professor's lantern bobbing up and down as he strode along.

As he continued bewilderedly to search the sands for some sign of Taggert, his eyes became better accustomed to the semi-darkness.

Suddenly he descried a long dark shape lying in the sand several rods away.

He approached it cautiously, only to discover what seemed to be a large log. But as he looked up another dark object ahead caught his eye. Surely that looked like the figure of a man sprawled upon the sand. Even as he looked, it moved and struggled to a sitting posture.

"Hello—that you, Taggert, old fellow?" he sang out, approaching.

"It's me all right," came Taggert's voice, weakly.

"What happened to you?"

"Fell over that dashed boulder back there. About knocked the wind out of me. I must have been going about forty miles an hour," he explained, getting to his feet with Robert's assistance.

"What are you two up to?" cried Professor Palmer, coming up with them.

"Our stowaway just tried to break his neck over a log back there."

"A log?" incredulously from the now recovered reporter. "Say, this is a desert, not a jungle! That was a rock I fell over."

They walked over to the object of their discussion, and examined it in the rays of the lantern.

"A petrified log," pronounced Professor Palmer.

"Well, who brought it out here?" —belligerently.

"It grew here many centuries ago, my boy. This is a relic of a dead forest, of which we are probably on the edge. See, there are others scattered about over that way. I have seen the same thing out in Arizona."

Their discussion ended, they decided to go back to the *Sphere* and get a good night's rest.

"Suppose some of these oafs have taken possession during our absence," suggested Taggert, persisting still in so calling the as yet unseen Martians.

"If it hadn't been for you young scamps it wouldn't have been left unguarded," retorted Professor Palmer.

But they found the *Sphere* as they had left it, and no one in sight.

With lights out for greater safety, they spent a quiet night. All three were up again with the dawn.

The warm sunshine streamed in at the windows cheerfully. Soon the thermometer on the shady side registered forty-one degrees and was rising rapidly. It had dropped to twenty-five the night before when they retired.

An appetizing breakfast was prepared by Taggert, who had insisted upon being the official cook. The keen Martian air and a good night's rest had brought them all ravenous appetites, and they did the simple repast full justice.

"Come to think about it," mused Taggert, "the night passed mighty quickly. Professor, how long are the nights and days on Mars?"

"The night seemed to pass quickly because you slept soundly. It happens that a Martian night and day together consume just about twenty-four hours and forty minutes, our time. In other words, by an odd

coincidence, Martian days and nights are each approximately but twenty minutes longer than those of the Earth."

The professor's last words were interrupted by Robert's abruptly rising to his feet and pointing mutely out the window!

12

MOVING swiftly toward them, about a quarter of a mile away, was a large conveyance which appeared to be occupied by about ten beings.

"Sink me, but these birds are certainly early risers," grumbled Taggert. "Seems to me they might let us finish breakfast before calling. They're no gentlemen, I say."

Professor Palmer was eagerly studying them through binoculars.

"Just as I suspected," he murmured presently. "They have features just like our own, and seem to be of nearly the same stature as ourselves. Let's get ready to welcome them, boys. They don't look like pirates."

He put down the glasses and turned just in time to see Taggert concealing an automatic on his person. Evidently the reporter didn't entirely share the professor's faith in the Martians.

A few minutes later the conveyance drew up without. It came to a stop noiselessly, as though it were electrically propelled. Several of the dark-garbed occupants got out and walked toward the *Sphere*, removing their odd hats, which looked not unlike broad-brimmed tropical helmets.

Professor Palmer's prediction proved correct. They were of ordinary human formation, and, indeed, looked much like a group of intelligent foreigners, with their olive skin and dark hair, though they were somewhat shorter in stature, averaging about five feet four inches in height.

Their clothing was simple, and evidently designed for comfort. All wore roomy, dark trousers, bound at the ankles, and small coats to match, not unlike vests with sleeves. Under these a lighter-hued blouse was worn. Neat but styleless shoes, with uppers that appeared to be finely woven grasses, clad their small feet. There was a total absence of bright color about their apparel, neutral shades of blue, gray and maroon predominating.

Professor Palmer opened one of the ports and leaned out. His appearance caused a brief flurry among their visitors, proving a signal for some hurried conversation, accompanied by excited gestures.

Then one of them walked forward and addressed him in a pleasant, soft, rolling tongue not unlike Spanish, but entirely unintelligible to the professor.

Professor Palmer answered by pointing obliquely upward in the general direction of the Earth at that time. Then he tapped the *Sphere* significantly, and indicated an imaginary course from the Earth above back down to Mars with a slow sweep of his hand.

His audience seemed to grasp the fact that the *Sphere* had come from a distant planet. In fact, it appeared that he had but confirmed some previous guess on their part. They nodded knowingly to each other as their spokesman resumed his own gesticulations in an effort to communicate with the professor, smiling in a friendly fashion and rubbing his Roman nose with a trace of self-consciousness as he proceeded to invite them, with elaborate gestures, to visit their country beyond.

His companions also pointed repeatedly toward the foliage in the distance, and to vacant seats in their vehicle.

"What do you think, boys?" asked the professor, turning to Robert and

Taggert. "How about boosting the *Sphere* over there? That will be better than leaving it out here where we can't keep an eye on it."

"Suits me," Robert replied.

"That's the stuff," said Taggert. "Don't let these dagos separate you from your return trip if you can help it."

So with more gestures Professor Palmer explained their intentions to the Martians, who finally understood apparently and seemed satisfied.

By careful manipulation of the speed of the gyrostats and the disk shutters, Robert raised the *Sphere* slowly to a height of about fifty feet. The Martians looked on in wonder from their conveyance, which, getting under way, preceded them across the floor of the desert.

The broad, flat wheels of this conveyance, notched to give greater traction, carried it over the sand at a good clip. Steering seemed to be controlled by an automatic dial-and-lever device, operated easily by the driver with one hand. The usual staggering of the front wheels through loose soil seemed entirely eliminated.

Contrary to their original impression, the floor of the desert in this direction was a stony, windswept waste with much bare rock visible. The faces of these rocks were polished by grains of sand blown across them by the winds of centuries. Here and there was one with fractured and crumbling surface, probably cracked by the rapid, alternate heating and chilling of the blazing rays of the sun and the cold nights, and not yet healed.

As the *Sphere* drew near the fertile land, they observed that it was densely wooded with trees of varied height and foliage. From their close proximity to the ground it looked like a vast, boundless forest which might extend many miles beyond.

Professor Palmer had estimated the usual width of these irrigated strips at from one to several miles, though he had mentioned observing one of nearly twenty miles in width.

At the forest's edge Robert brought the *Sphere* to rest.

Here they were in a quandary as to what to do about the *Sphere*. It was obvious that they could not study the life of the planet without leaving the *Sphere*. Yet they were naturally reluctant to trust it unguarded into the hands of these strange inhabitants.

"But we have already risked far more in our journey through space," reasoned Robert. "We put ourselves in these people's hands by coming here; now I suppose we may as well trust them. We could not expect a Martian, coming to the Earth as we have come to Mars, to drag his '*Sphere*' after him everywhere he went."

"Look here," Taggert interjected, "I horned my way into this expedition uninvited. Now let me do something useful. I'll stay here with the *Sphere* until you can make some satisfactory arrangement for its safe keeping."

"That may take several days, or more," objected Robert.

"Well, what of it? Plenty to eat here. Just run along and leave it to little Hughie. I'll stay on deck until you return or send me a written order; and I'll feel a lot better about having done my bit."

So it was finally agreed that Taggert remain on guard while Robert and the Professor went on to make suitable arrangements, if possible, with the authorities. They shook hands with the reporter and left him calmly smoking an atrocious pipe which he had not ventured to put in action during their long trip with sealed windows. He seemed genuinely comfortable and well pleased with his lot. Robert and the professor

took seats in the waiting conveyance, which carried them over a winding road through the forest.

Professor Palmer recognized and pointed out to Robert certain varieties of trees and shrubbery resembling the tamarisk, acacia and eucalyptus, prickly pear and aspen poplar. The latter variety, which was singularly like the earthly specimen, predominated, and seemed to flourish luxuriantly in the loose, sandy soil.

"Not so bad," said Robert, sniffing the sweet, clean air.

"A very healthful climate, indeed," commented the professor.

Their evident satisfaction was observed with smiles and nods by their hosts, who were watching them closely.

They had probably passed through a mile of the great forest when they emerged into a large, rectangular clearing.

"Why, there's a railroad!" cried Robert excitedly, pointing to what looked very like a double line of tracks running through the center of the long clearing.

A moment later Robert's statement was proved to be true, for their conveyance was brought to a stop beside the rails, where a small but well built wooden structure apparently served as a crude station.

At the invitation of the Martians they got out, declining, however, the suggestion of entering the waiting room of the building. They preferred to examine first the wonders of their strange outdoor surroundings. The Martians gathered about and proceeded to study them with poorly concealed curiosity. Yet at all times their attitude toward the adventurers was solicitous and courteous. To Robert they seemed more and more like a delegation of learned experts sent to observe their every move and thought as closely as possible.

About the clearing stood a number of plain buildings of goodly size, with numerous windows. Several Martians in rough garb, including the loose trousers and blouse, but without the odd coats or hats worn by the first Martians, busied themselves about these buildings. In the distance there were sounds of chopping, and an occasional resounding thud, as from a tree felled. They seemed to be in a lumber camp, and this conjecture was later confirmed. They were standing then in the heart of one of the planet's greatest forest regions.

Presently Robert became aware of a humming sound. Looking about quickly, he failed at first to see from whence it came. Then he discovered for the first time the great distance that it was possible to see in either direction along the railroad, because of its striking straightness. Mile after mile it ran straight as an arrow through a veritable tunnel of trees.

In the distance he descried a swiftly moving speck on the madder-colored ribbon of roadbed. It grew rapidly larger, evidently nearing them at a tremendous rate. A minute later a Martian train, drawn by a squat engine, ground to a stop before the station. Like the conveyance which had met them, it seemed electrically driven. Only one man was visible in the engine cab. Robert counted eight coaches, each about sixty feet long.

Their guides conducted them to the back coach, which they entered at one end. This coach differed considerably from the rest, for while the others were built with compartments similar to English coaches, this one was not unlike one of our own observation cars. It was unoccupied. They found out afterward that their guides composed a special committee which had arranged for this car in

their guests' honor, the *Sphere's* approach having been discovered and observed closely by Martian astronomers as it neared the planet. Every effort and provision had been made to find and meet its expected inmates promptly, and with every consideration for their comfort.

They were scarcely aboard before the train was moving. Without a jar the luxurious coach slipped away from the little station, gathering momentum rapidly. A minute later the station dwindled and was lost from view behind them down the shrinking avenue of trees which whirled past them dizzily.

"Just like greased lightning," said Robert.

It was evident that the owl-eyed committee of Martians were eager to establish some code of communication by means of signs with their guests, but observing their desire to study the changing landscape they politely refrained. One of the Martians, however, evinced considerable curiosity over Robert's watch chain, whereupon Robert displayed his watch. Not to be outdone, the Martian pulled out a small, flat mechanism about an inch and a half square. A glance at this object convinced Robert that he was looking at a Martian watch.

The indicating scheme was essentially the same as our own method. There was a small dial in the center, with sixteen curious numerals round its edge. The hands, of the same length, but of contrasting colors, apparently indicated the time, while in the upper corners were changeable numerals, probably showing what corresponded to the Martian month and day of the month. The lower corners were not utilized, but were simply decorated with some artistic scrolls. A third, but shorter hand, also connected to the central dial, revolving rapidly with a familiar ticking sound, probably corresponded to the second-hand on our own watches, but it was more like the long hand on a split-second stop-watch.

The case of Robert's watch seemed to interest the Martians no less than its mechanism. The watch was an old one of the bulky type which had belonged to Robert's father. The heavy case was of solid silver. From their exclamations, as they examined the silver case, Robert judged that they prized silver highly as a precious metal.

By this time the character of the country had changed. No longer were they surrounded by the fragrant forest. Vast, level, green fields stretched on either side, while in the distance the equally flat desert was visible at times.

The speed of the train began diminishing until it came to a stop beside another small station. Here they got their first view of one of the great canals or ducts upon which the plant life and the lives of every being on Mars depended.

About a hundred yards beyond the station a gang of two hundred or more men were at work in and around a deep excavation, aided by several huge digging machines. All were clad in rough garments of a dull maroon color, which Robert soon learned was as common a color on Mars as our own khaki is to us.

But it was not the Martians which attracted Robert's and Professor Palmer's chief attention. A giant cylinder lay partly exposed within the excavation, its ends disappearing into the soil at either end. In diameter it was at least seventy-five feet. It appeared to be of cementlike construction.

At intervals of perhaps fifty yards along its length, smaller tubes branched off and were lost in the sides of the ditch. Where one of these branches joined the main line, a swarm of workmen struggled val-

iantly to mend a break from which the water gushed as if under heavy pressure.

The scurrying Martians had checked the leak perceptibly by the time the train started again after a minute's wait.

A few minutes later they flashed by an immense structure situated near the tracks, looking like a great power plant of some kind. However, it reared no stacks to the sky. For miles at either end of it stretched a vast, flat expanse of some curious construction, which in the distance looked like a great, elongated checker-board.

"A Martian pumping station," hazarded Robert.

"I believe you've struck it," said Professor Palmer. "And I believe the big 'checker-board' is nothing more nor less than a device for absorbing power from the sun's rays. That alone would explain the Martians' remarkable achievements in the face of the unquestionable dwindling, perhaps complete exhaustion, of the planet's fuel supply."

"How old do you suppose Mars is?" asked Robert.

"That's a hard one; but the various planets are classified according to stages. There is the sun stage, in which the planet is hot enough to emit light. This is followed by the molten stage—hot, but lightless. Then comes the solidifying stage, with the formation of solid surfaces and ocean basins. The next stage is what we call the terraqueous stage, the age of sedimentary rocks. Our Earth is in this stage. Following this is the terrestrial stage, in which the oceans have disappeared, and, after that the dead stage, when air has departed. Mars is in the terrestrial stage, the stage following that of our planet, and preceding the dead, or final stage."

"Then the Martians are engaged in a constant struggle against extinction?"

"They are, though, with their marvelous ingenuity, they may last a few thousand years longer. But we are witnesses of the waning of a world."

They were now passing through a fertile farming region. Small buildings dotted the landscape, while here and there Martian farmers were diligently at work in their fields. There was a complete absence, however, of any beast of burden or toil. Everywhere power seemed to be furnished electrically. Farmers could be seen plowing with large, powerful tractors.

Frequently they caught glimpses of the checker-board devices adjoining the buildings, but on a much smaller scale than the one they had first seen. Quite likely, they decided, these were individual sun-power plants.

With the increasing frequency of houses, Robert and the professor became convinced that they were nearing a center of population. Their interest was keyed to the highest pitch as the agricultural district gave way to the outskirts of a Martian city.

The more Robert saw, the greater was his surprize at the striking similarity of things to those on Earth. Yet, on second thought, this did not seem so strange. After all, it was to be expected that the chief inventions of two such advanced worlds should, in the main, be similar. He might easily have imagined himself approaching some foreign metropolis.

One thing that they noticed particularly was the absence of the dirt and squalor which one so frequently sees from the train when approaching our large industrial centers. Buildings all seemed of substantial construction and everywhere were in excellent condition.

Now, beyond the buildings in the foreground they could see the tops of giant structures in the distance, their great white walls showing resplendent in the clean atmosphere and bright sunlight. It was certain that they were entering a very large city. They afterward learned that this city, called Parang, was next to the largest one on Mars, having a population more than four million souls.

LITTLE conversation passed between Robert and the professor as they both eagerly studied the mysteries of Martian life passing before their eyes. Neither could yet quite bring himself to a full realization of the fact that they were actually viewing life upon the planet which had caused so much conjecture upon Earth.

"I wonder whether we shall pull in on the 'elevated' or the 'subway,'" grinned Robert.

His question was answered a few minutes later as they plunged into the darkness of a tunnel. For ten minutes or more they roared swiftly through the darkness, dimly illuminated by the incandescents in the ceiling of their car. Then they emerged suddenly into a vast, brilliantly lighted underground chamber, filled with the din of noisy bustle, and came to a stop before a large barred area.

Here their hosts politely signified that they should get out.

News of their arrival had probably preceded them. A great, curious crowd thronged the area. Half of their body of guides led the way through one of the gates, forcing a passage for them through the dense, curious crowd. It was here that Robert caught his first sight of the Martian women. Unconsciously he was expecting to find the golden-haired type of his dream. But in this he was disappointed, for, without exception, they were dark-haired, and with complexions of a pale, olive tint, as were the men.

The women's garments did not differ greatly from those of their men folk, in that they wore a variety of loose trousers like those worn by our Turkish women. Perhaps their garb is best described by stating that it was strikingly similar to that of the women in the Mohammedan harems, without the face veil.

Passing through a massive archway, they walked up a few steps leading into a large waiting room not unlike one of ours. Through the throng they continued and entered a roomy elevator which whisked them upward. Emerging from this they found themselves once more in the daylight, and in a great vestibule leading to the street.

Outside, several closed conveyances waited, evidently engaged by prearrangement. Robert and Professor Palmer entered one of these with two of their beaming hosts, sinking down into the luxurious upholstering gratefully.

As they rolled along, Robert and the professor studied the scenes around them in suppressed excitement.

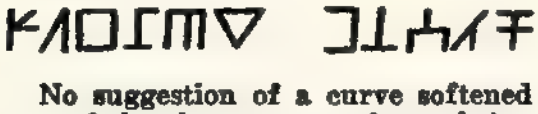
The first feature which struck Robert was the immense height of the buildings, practically all of which were of ten stories or more. Buildings of thirty stories were common, while several they passed were more than sixty stories. The rather narrow streets seemed like miniature canyons between the tall structures. Without exception the buildings appeared to be constructed of a fine cement, similar to the metallic product of which the railroad rails were made.

The street paving and walks were also made of the same material, and were in excellent condition. No poles or wires were visible; nor were any street-cars or tracks seen. Evidently with such excellently maintained

pavings made possible by the weak gravity, the Martians preferred ordinary vehicles for city transportation.

Stores of all sorts seemed plentiful, though Robert could not see what kind they were, because they did not display their wares as we do. The Martians apparently had outlived the practise of wasting window space in this manner, preferring merely to advertise their wares by signs. These signs, of course, were wholly unintelligible to Robert and the professor. The lettering was made up of a number of geometrical figures, among which the familiar triangle, square and "T," with variations, predominated.

Once, when their conveyance was temporarily stalled in a traffic congestion, Robert got out a pencil and attempted to reproduce the characters which appeared in relief over the doorway of an imposing-looking building near by:



No suggestion of a curve softened any of the characters, each one being made up of a series of straight lines and angles. In fact, Robert already had observed that this severe precision was a marked characteristic of all things Martian. It was particularly noticeable in the architecture. The impression borne upon him was that this people had reduced everything to a science of fine mathematics.

A RIDE of some twenty minutes brought them into a quieter section of the city. Here the streets were somewhat wider. The tall buildings gave way to more modest structures, which appeared to be dwellings not unlike our apartment buildings.

No sign of any growing thing was visible anywhere—not even a blade of grass. Evidently the painful scarcity of water upon the planet did not permit of floral culture for merely ornamental purposes. Theirs was a serious business of scientific economy.

In due time they turned into a broad driveway leading to an immense, official building of four stories. Here Robert saw the first bit of ground uncovered by cement or stone since they had arrived in the city. The grounds surrounding the building, and its drives, were covered with verdure similar to a fine clover, closely cut. Some trees grew about the place, but there were no flowers.

Their conductors were visibly excited as they drew up before a broad flight of stairs leading up to the main entrance of the massive building. A pompous person opened the door of their conveyance, and escorted them ceremoniously up the steps beyond which a small group of dignified-appearing Martians awaited their arrival.

As they drew nigh the group, a commanding figure of a man detached himself from it and advanced toward them. At this their escort fell back respectfully, leaving them to greet this evidently important personage.

In stature this man was several inches taller than the average Martian, being about the size of a well-built man of our own race. Imperious, resplendent in rich garments, he easily dominated the smart assemblage.

A smile played over his virile features as he stopped before them. Strangely enough at such a moment, his odd, square, and particularly luxuriant beard reminded Robert of a nonsensical little rime which he recalled, something like this:

Aha, it is as I feared,
Two cocks and a hen,
One owl and a wren,
Have all made their home in my beard.

With an air of kingly elegance, this leader addressed them for several

minutes in his strange tongue as in a welcome. Though it was mutually apparent that neither understood the other's words, Robert responded briefly, thanking him for his evident welcome, Professor Palmer nodding his concurrence.

Indicating that they were to accompany him, the leader escorted them through the assembled, obsequious gathering of men and women, through the broad entrance into the building. Passing along a beautiful corridor of carved onyx, they presently entered a large, pleasant room with windows looking out upon the grounds.

Two attendants came forward at their entrance. These the leader addressed in a commanding tone, indicating Robert and the professor in a manner which convinced them that these men were to serve them during their stay at the establishment; and this they found to be the case. With a few more friendly words their host politely withdrew.

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Robert and Professor Palmer found that they had been presented with an entire suite of rooms, the one into which they had been escorted serving as a sort of drawing room. The two attendants looked after their every want.

About noon a simple lunch was served them. It consisted of a dish resembling baked yams, some artichokes (at any rate they looked and tasted like artichokes), a bit of greens, and some very good wine.

That afternoon they were visited by an intelligent-looking Martian who quickly succeeded in making them understand that he was sent to act as instructor in the Martian tongue and also as an interpreter while they were learning. He signified that the emperor (the striking personage to whom they owed all this hospitality) had sent him.

The same evening they accepted the emperor's invitation to dinner.

To their relief, Robert and the professor found that the dinner was to be attended by few besides themselves. The emperor sat between them at the head of the table. The interpreter sat next to Robert. But three other persons partook of the meal with them. These they understood to be certain learned men, probably astronomers.

The food seemed to be made up chiefly of well-cooked vegetables, several of which were quite similar to our own. A savory bit of roasted meat was also served them. This dish puzzled them. It did not seem to be of a fowl, though it certainly had the flavor of one, tasting much like duck. Not until some time later did they find out that this meat was that of an animal identical with our dog! It was, however, considered a delicacy by the Martians, who raised these animals with great care, they being quite scarce.

Though conversation was as yet very difficult, they managed to exchange a surprizing amount of information with the Martians, the interpreter proving quite resourceful. The emperor, especially, was intensely interested in them.

So keen was the interest of the Martians, that, after the repast was cleared away, paper of excellent texture was produced, and Robert and the professor were urged to do some sketching. Their hosts clearly were eager to overcome the barrier of languages and to partly satisfy their curiosity at once regarding our planet. A sort of stylograph was handed to Professor Palmer, and with it he proceeded first to make a simple diagram of the universe, showing the Earth and Mars thereon in their orbits round the sun, and indicating their journey from the Earth to Mars.

This was followed by prompt nods of understanding and ejaculations on the part of the three Martian astronomers, as if their expectations had been confirmed. The professor then drew maps of the Earth's continents, rivers and seas, and made sectional drawings of mountain ridges, volcanoes and ocean beds. The Martians' intelligent minds seemed to grasp everything with remarkable perception.

The three technologists apparently would have been content to keep Robert and Professor Palmer up all night in their zeal for information, but the emperor had more consideration for his guests, insisting finally upon seeing them back to their comfortable quarters, where he took leave of them for the evening.

That night they rested in the welcome softness of luxurious beds. The day's travel and excitement had fatigued them, and they slept soundly in spite of the strangeness of their surroundings.

Robert dreamed again of his maid of the desert. As before, she faded suddenly away, even as he reached out eagerly to assure himself that she was real. One vivid impression that he received and retained upon waking was that she was in peril. The look of entreaty in her eyes, the repeated startled glances that she cast over her shoulder, convinced him that she needed him.

But, why should he worry over a mere dream? His practical mind reasserted itself. Of course the girl did not exist in reality. Still, there was no denying that the girl of his first vision and of the last one were one and the same. He could never forget a single detail of her exotic beauty and charm. For the first time in his life Robert felt the awakening of real love.

He laughed. In love with a dream-girl! Nonsense. Nevertheless, his thoughts returned to her continually throughout the day. Unconsciously he found himself hoping to see her, somewhere, somehow. And more and more, in spite of his commonplace reasoning, he came to feel that there *was* such a girl.

That day they saw nothing of the emperor. The interpreter labored faithfully with them part of the morning and again during the afternoon. Already they felt that they were making some genuine progress toward an understanding of the Martian tongue.

Their every comfort continued to be administered to. As they sat before the windows looking out upon the lawn bathed in the late afternoon sunlight, it required an effort indeed for them to fully realize that they were gazing upon a strange planet millions of miles from the Earth.

"What do you think we had best do about the *Sphere*, Robert?" asked Professor Palmer.

"The very thing that has been puzzling me. These people seem to be such an intellectual race that I can hardly believe them dangerous, though there is a certain elusive suggestion about the emperor's face that I don't fancy. However, I think the *Sphere* would be just as safe or safer here, and with Taggert staying with us."

"My idea exactly. Now that you mention it I think there is something in what you say about the emperor, but we'll have to make the best of things. Let's try to find out through our interpreter where it will be agreeable to keep the *Sphere* hereabouts and then send a message to Taggert to bring it."

So it was agreed. Explanation to the interpreter proved a comparatively simple matter. A few sketches and gestures and he signified his understanding. A short while later he returned to inform them that the emperor had assigned

them a structure near the palace in which they could keep the *Sphere*. Further, that the emperor would be delighted, not only to view the *Sphere*, but to welcome their companion.

A note to Taggert was dispatched at once by a courier supplied by the emperor. The courier was instructed to accompany Taggert back in the *Sphere*, guiding him to the palace. As Taggert had thoroughly mastered the operation of the *Sphere* under Robert's tutelage, during the watches of their long journey through space, they felt no uneasiness about his ability to fly it to where they were.

This matter settled, Robert and the professor sat down before a sumptuous dinner served in their suite. They were becoming accustomed to the well-cooked Martian food, and they relished it.

The confinement in the building since the middle of the previous day, however, was becoming irksome. The interpreter had not encouraged any suggestion about going out, and they had politely refrained from pressing the matter. Left to themselves after dinner, they decided to take a stroll outdoors.

Robert had observed a secluded nook behind the palace. The windows of their bedchamber opened on this enclosure, which was entirely surrounded by a wall about twelve feet high. Apparently the wall was without any gate. A number of small trees marked the smooth lawn within, casting long shadows in the gathering twilight.

It was in this nook that Robert proposed they take a stroll.

As they reached the exit leading out upon the enclosure, one of their attendants appeared rather abruptly at a door to their left. He paused there a moment as if about to speak, then disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared.

"So—we are under surveillance, eh?" remarked Professor Palmer.

"I wonder. He did look at us rather suspiciously."

"Well, let's go ahead and see whether they stop us."

But they were not molested as they stepped out upon the lawn.

The cool dry air refreshed and invigorated them. It was free from the dampness of the dew which we are accustomed to feeling on our clear terrestrial nights, while the rarity of the Martian atmosphere was probably made up by a greater percentage of oxygen, as evidenced by the ease and enjoyment with which they breathed it. This they later affirmed. Tubercular diseases upon Mars were virtually unknown. In fact, the Martians were afflicted with little sickness of any kind.

For perhaps fifteen minutes they walked about, smoking cigars from their slender store which they had carried from the *Sphere* in their pockets. The fleeting Martian twilight was replaced by darkness—that is, if one can call night filled with the soft radiance of millions of stars "darkness." Over the edge of the wall at the western end of the garden hung Phobus, one-half its disk lit in a dull orange glow. It appeared about one-quarter the size of our moon.

A strange feeling of oppression, which he could not understand, possessed Robert. Try as he would he could not shake it off. Then he realized for the first time the intense silence which pervaded the night. There was a total absence of the countless sounds of nature which we are so accustomed to associating with summer nights. Apparently there were no insects upon Mars, or, if there were, they were voiceless. Their own voices startled them when they broke the stillness, and unconsciously they took to speaking in hushed whispers.

A FEW feet to the right of their doorway the palace wall ran out into the garden at a right angle for about fifty feet, thence it again turned off at a right angle to the right. The garden ran around this extension and back into a recess on the other side like the lower part of a large letter L.

Suddenly a woman's stifled scream tore the silence apart. It ceased abruptly, suggestive of the clapping of a hand over the mouth of the one who had screamed. The sound seemed to come from the recess at the far side of the garden.

In a dozen lithe bounds Robert had rounded the wing of the palace, and was in sight of the far end of the garden. He fancied that he caught a fleeting glimpse of some light, loose garment in the dark shadows of the recess. A faint sound as of the stealthy turning of a lock followed, and all was again quiet.

A moment later Professor Palmer joined him.

"What's up?" he asked huskily, puffing from his exertion of attempting to keep pace with Robert.

"Don't know. Imagined I saw a woman's garment fluttering a moment ago. Suppose we have a look over there in that black corner."

A solitary dark window looked out sinisterly from the recess. Robert had an uncomfortable feeling that they were being watched from it as they approached.

As they drew close to the wall where it joined the building Robert caught sight of something they had failed to notice before in the darkness. This was a massive, closed door in the corner of the wall.

"The door I heard locked a minute ago," whispered Robert.

He put his shoulder to it, but failed to move it.

The night again was as silent as a grave. In vain they listened for some sound beyond the locked door, till finally they gave it up and returned to the comfortable warmth of their suite.

THAT night Robert tossed about nervously until he despaired of sleeping. He envied the professor, whose measured breathing he could hear from the adjoining room. Later he dropped off into troubled slumber and dreamed once more of the maid of the desert.

This time the scene was a different one, the palace garden the setting instead of the desert. Step by step the incident of that evening was enacted again with this difference: in some strange manner he could see all that occurred in a garden which was on the other side of the wall with the locked door.

A maid—his maid—emerged from a door in the palace and hurried across the garden. Reaching the wall she fumbled among a mass of vines which clung to its side. She pulled something from behind them which he could not at first make out in the shadow. As she propped it against the wall he recognized it as a small ladder.

This she mounted quickly, looking back several times as if fearing pursuit. Just as she reached the top of the wall a man ran out of the doorway from which she had first appeared, and looked around swiftly. He was immediately joined by another. Both caught sight of the girl as she paused to drop on the other side of the wall.

Held by some invisible force Robert found it impossible to go to her assistance. He was obliged to remain merely a spectator.

The girl's pursuers dashed across the garden and scrambled over the wall after her. She tripped over her long gown and fell. Before she could recover, one of them was upon her.

Together they lifted her struggling form and carried it back toward the massive door in the wall. There they halted while one of them fitted a key to the lock. A moment later it swung open. Just as they were taking her through the door, she screamed, and one of her captors clapped his hand over her mouth roughly. Then the door shut softly, but the sound of a heavy lock shot home reached Robert.

With the shutting of the door Robert suddenly was released from his trance. With a mighty bound he made for the wall—only to find himself standing awake in the middle of the floor of his bedchamber!

The vividness of his dream had left him trembling with excitement. He felt convinced that he had just visioned a review of the actual events of earlier in the evening. Prompted by the impulse of the moment, and realizing the impossibility of further sleep that night, Robert donned his clothes and quietly passed out into the garden.

He shivered as the chilled atmosphere struck him, and turned up his coat collar. The glory of Phobus no longer lit the crystal-clear sky, but in the soft light from the brilliant stars he could make out the wall running into the recess.

He found the stout door as securely locked as before.

Remembering his increased agility on Mars, Robert decided not to be restricted by a mere door while his reckless mood lasted. A jump and a clutching of the cornice quickly put him astride the wall with no discomfort save a bumped knee. A drop on the other side and he found himself in the garden of his dream.

"Now that I've arrived, what next?" he mused.

Looking round the enclosure he observed that it corresponded exactly in size and shape to the one on their side of the wall. All windows were dark. There was nothing to suggest the disturbance of the early evening. The ladder—if indeed, there had been a ladder there—was gone. But the mass of vines on the wall corresponded exactly to that in his dream!

"I suppose if I were a real hero I would dash in and rescue the distressed maiden in some way or other," Robert muttered, scratching his head in perplexity.

As if in answer to his quandary a window above scraped lightly. A folded piece of paper fell at his feet. He looked up just in time to see a graceful, ivory-white hand being withdrawn. Was it the draperies or her garments that he saw behind the pane as the window was lowered gently?

The paper was crammed into his pocket and, after a swift glance around, he hurriedly scaled the wall, realizing the uselessness and folly of attempting there to read by the light of a match a note written in a still unfamiliar language.

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"Boys, howdy," Taggert greeted them.

The *Sphere* had been safely brought and placed in the building provided. Official greetings and curiosity had been taken care of and the three adventurers were again united and alone.

"Pretty nearly scared that little Martian stiff," Taggert went on, "not to mention myself. We hopped off a little bit too strong and before you could say 'uncle' we were almost lost in the old ozone. Guess he thought I'd decided to kidnap him and take him home. He jabbered something scandalous. But I soon got things straightened out and we beat it here P. D. Q."

The days following were spent chiefly in the learning of the Martian language by all three. Robert was particularly anxious to master the Martian code of writing, sufficiently

to enable him to decipher the note which had been thrown to him in the garden. Not trusting the interpreter, he could not request him to read it to him.

He selected characters and words from the note and tactfully brought them out during the lessons until he finally had obtained a fairly accurate idea of the note's contents. That the girl and her father were political prisoners by the emperor's command he made out. Just why, or what her immediate danger was, Robert was still unable to decipher accurately, but he got the impression that she was threatened with a morganatic marriage to the emperor.

Until he could learn the exact contents of the epistle and grasp a sufficient knowledge of the Martian tongue to discover something about their political intrigues, Robert decided that any move he could make would result in more harm than good for her. He longed for some means of communication with her in order that he might let her know that he was but waiting the right time to help her. If he could but speak or write the same language! Then he might at least manage somehow to tell her that he had not forgotten her. Though he had not yet seen her he stedfastly believed her to be the girl of his dreams.

At the end of a week Robert, in his zeal, had so far out-distanced his companions in the mastery of the Martian tongue that they were both continually asking him about this or that word. He could already make most of their wants known through speech to the attendants.

It was about this time that one of their two attendants, a young, pleasant-faced chap, called Modah, startled Robert by stealthily handing him a small, sealed envelope when they were alone for a moment. Making a sign of secrecy the Martian hurried off. Robert pocketed the envelope as the other attendant entered just then.

The reading of this note, though longer, proved easier than the first. Robert recognized the signature immediately. However, it was not until two days later that he succeeded in completely deciphering both notes, and that only by tactful questioning of the interpreter.

The first read thus:

My friend:

I call you "friend" because they tell me you have come from a far planet and I know that one so daring can not be cruel like my captors.

My father and I are held as political prisoners here by Emperor Kharnov who is trying to force me to marry him.

If you can read this letter, will you not try to help my father and me to escape?

ZOLA.

The second note plainly had been written less hurriedly than the other, in which several characters were imperfectly formed. This one covered two sheets:

My friend:

Modah, the faithful, will give you this note. He has told me much about you and I feel that I may, indeed, count on you as a friend.

This is to tell you that he can be depended upon to death. He was a servant of my father's palace in the country of the snow where my father ruled. Modah secured a place in the emperor's palace to help us. My maid, who came with me, also is loyal.

The emperor rules supreme over the entire planet, but he usurped the crown during my father's youth, giving my father the governorship of one of the polar regions instead.

He feared my father, and, on the pretext of a conference, invited us here only to make us prisoners. He threatens to take my father's life if he does not publicly renounce his title, and will try to force me to become a morganatic wife to himself.

Help our just cause, O my friend, and our gratitude will not be lacking

Trust Modah. ZOLA.

The notes made a profound impression upon Robert. He pictured the girl of his vision again for the hundredth time. Could it really have been she whom he had already

dreamed of thrice? But no matter who she was, he was firmly determined to find some means of helping her.

By this time he had a fair command of the Martian writing—enough, at least, to write an intelligible, if elementary, message. That night he succeeded in passing a brief note to Modah, unobserved by Numid, the other attendant. In this note Robert asked Modah to see him in the seclusion of the East Room as soon as he could elude the sharp-eyed Numid.

He had selected the East Room, a sort of library in their apartment, for the rendezvous because it had but one entrance. Here Robert waited anxiously for what seemed hours. Finally there came a light, furtive tapping on the door. Then Modah slipped into the room quickly.

It had been the professor's suggestion that Robert talk to Modah alone, since it was evident that it was Robert in whom his interest and that of his mistress was centered.

"Numid wasted much time, *Elah*. Talk, talk, talk. I waited till he slept—then came. He must not know. Would get suspicious."

"I want to help your mistress," Robert told him. "How will it be possible for me to see her?"

"I have arranged to take you to her this night, if you wish."

"Good work, Modah. Shall we start now?"

"At once, *Elah*. Follow me."

So, with quickened pulse, Robert accompanied him, having first informed Professor Palmer and Taggert of his mission. Through the apartment they passed silently and entered a small antechamber at its rear. From this chamber several doorways gave egress, one of which led into a long, dark and narrow passage where Robert had to feel his way cautiously. The uncomfortable suspicion occurred to him that this might all be but a scheme to do away with him quietly. But he reconsidered, realizing how completely they were all in the Martians' power; it did not seem reasonable to suppose that they would take such elaborate pains to do away with him.

PRESENTLY they emerged into another anteroom similar to the one adjoining their own apartment. A soft glow from a shaded lamp illuminated the chamber. Through a broad archway on the right floated the soft strains of some stringed instrument. Robert halted unconsciously. Never had he heard sweeter music.

Modah's insistent gestures finally roused him from his revery. Having succeeded in attracting Robert's attention, he passed through the archway, motioning him to follow.

The heavy portières parted before them. A large room of luxurious tapestries and upholsterings dimly illuminated by rose-shaded lights met his eyes. As they entered, the music ceased.

Then Robert saw a vision rise from beside a large harplike instrument at the other side of the room and approach them. As she passed a lamp its rays bathed her head in its glow. His dreams were come true. She was the girl of his vision! Not for nothing had he thrice dreamed of her. He would have known her among a thousand.

The majesty of empresses and the grace of a nymph were hers as she moved toward them. Serenely, and without hesitation, she came directly to Robert and placed her hands in his. Her lovely eyes looked into his trustfully.

"I knew you would come," she said simply.

Her low, clear voice was a joy. The loveliness of her held him speechless.

*Excellency.

"And I knew that I should find you," he answered, finding his tongue at last.

She led him to a couch and commanded him to sit beside her. Modah had vanished.

"We may be surprized at any moment by a visit from the emperor or one of his spies," she said. "We must make our plans quickly."

"I am at your command, princess," said Robert.

"There remain but two days in which to escape. The time set by the usurper for my father's final decision expires then. My father will never bow to him. I shudder to think of what may follow."

Robert pondered a minute. Obviously the *Sphere* offered the most promising avenue of escape; but how to gain access to it at night without arousing suspicion and probably fatal resistance was the question. A plan came to him. He could visit the *Sphere* the following afternoon under some plausible excuse without exciting suspicion, and could remain tinkering in it, ostensibly to make some repairs. Unless disturbed, he could wait till dark, then cautiously bring it over to the garden.

The scheme was simple enough, but the possibilities for failure were numerous. Should the emperor become suspicious and have the *Sphere* watched, his plans would be of no avail. A dozen other possible obstacles occurred to him but no better plan.

Swiftly he outlined it to Zola, obtaining her promise that she and her father would be in readiness to leave the following night. Her absolute confidence in his ability at once disturbed and inspired Robert. He felt that he must succeed at all costs. Here was probably his only chance of saving the maid of his dreams. He must not be found wanting.

"Quick! The emperor!" said Modah, tensely, appearing suddenly, as from nowhere.

Pressing the princess' hand in hasty farewell, Robert followed Modah quickly. Down the long hallway they hurried. At a dark and forbidding doorway Modah halted and signaled Robert to follow. The next moment they had plunged into the darkness of a narrow passage leading off the main one. Groping blindly along the wall in the wake of Modah's hurrying footsteps, Robert narrowly missed flattening his nose against the opposite wall as they turned a sharp bend. A moment later, however, a faint light glimmered ahead, revealing Modah scurrying along, a few yards in advance.

A moment later Modah stopped. Together they listened for some sound of pursuit. But the silence of the massive, walled passage was unbroken save for their own bated breath. Once more they hurried ahead, and soon Robert recognized with relief the passage leading into their apartment.

Both Taggert and the professor were eagerly awaiting him. Briefly Robert explained the result of his excursion, and suggested his plans for their escape with the princess and her father. It developed that Modah had taken a different and roundabout route back for greater safety, though the divers dim passages all had looked much alike to Robert. He was only certain that it had taken them longer to return. He resolved to substantially reward the vigilant Modah at the first opportunity. Had the emperor discovered him with the princess, all would have been lost.

EARLY in the morning Taggert left to examine the *Sphere* and survey the ground for an escape. Ostensibly he went to obtain some needed articles of wearing apparel. Robert

and the professor took the precaution to instruct him as to what articles they wanted at breakfast, while Modah and Numid were both present.

Immediately after breakfast, and during Taggert's absence, they were visited by the emperor. Fearing to hear of his own clandestine call upon the princess, Robert prepared himself for the worst.

But the emperor apparently was ignorant of the matter, for he merely inquired regarding their welfare and begged them to accept an invitation to attend a meeting of his learned men to discuss life on the two planets. He seemed much pleased over their progress in the Martian tongue.

While he was there Taggert returned with the articles mentioned that morning. These he made no effort to conceal. After a few words with him the emperor bid them adieu.

"When is this meeting he's spouting about?" Taggert inquired anxiously.

"Tomorrow evening," said Robert. "Too bad we must miss it. Professor Palmer could gather a great deal of interesting data regarding Mars from those men."

"He would if those pirates would give him a chance to ask a question," said Taggert. "But the chances are that they'd keep him dizzy satisfying their own curiosity."

"Never mind, boys. I'll no doubt have other favorable opportunities to gather all the data I want from our polar friends when we reach their country. What is more important now is the condition of the *Sphere*. You haven't told us what shape you found things in, Taggert."

"Oh, everything looks all right, thank goodness," answered Taggert. "I took a peep into the petrol tanks, too, and turned the gyrostats over a few revolutions. Saw a couple of these runts hanging around, but I guess we'll be able to pull off our party O. K. I tried to act as if there was something out of order for their benefit in case they were spies."

"Good idea. That will offer a plausible reason for my going over this afternoon," said Robert.

Having laid all their plans carefully, Robert and Taggert visited the *Sphere* late that afternoon, and together they tinkered and tested for the benefit of the two or three Martians who were ever about, as well as for their own benefit to see that everything was in working condition. Fortunately everything was in the same shape as when they had left it. About sunset Taggert left, taking word that Robert was engrossed in making some delicate repairs and would not return for dinner.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

WEIRD TALES, from its inception, has endeavored to seek out stories of a type that readers can find nowhere else, and most of its stories could be placed under two classifications. First, there are the occult stories and stories of psychic phenomena—such tales as have exercised the pens of many great masters: Poe, Hawthorne, Irving, Rider Haggard, Wilkie Collins, and many others. To this class belongs the greatest of Sir Walter Scott's stories, *Wandering Willie's Tale,* which will be published in WEIRD TALES as our next month's reprint story. The other classification is highly imaginative stories, tales of advancement of the arts and sciences to which the generation of writers who create them have not yet attained. All writers of such stories are prophets, and in the years to come many of their prophecies will come true. The most noted exponents of this type of weird tale are Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. Some people turn up their noses at such stories, and delude themselves with the statement that they are too practical to read such stuff. The illustrious scientist Huxley wrote a suitable answer for them long ago: "Those who refuse to go beyond fact rarely get as far as fact." Certain it is that many incredible things forecast twenty years ago by Jules Verne and H. G. Wells have since come to be realities. And it is such stories that WEIRD TALES seeks to give to its readers.

A stirring story of this type is *Red Ether,* by Pettersen Marzoni, which will be printed soon. Imagine a nation in chaos, imagine Congress in session with the President of the United States; the huge Capitol shimmers and twists, and is reduced in ten seconds time to a cloud of red dust through etheric vibrations sent by radio. Incredible, perhaps; but scientists are actually experimenting on the atom, trying to disrupt it; and is it entirely beyond the limits of the conceivable that science may sometime discover a wave force that will counteract the vibrations of the electrons, stop their rotation, and thereby cause the atoms to simply cease to exist?

We have many imaginative tales of science in store for our readers, and a treasure-hoard of occult and mystic tales. Poe specialized in tales of terror and mystery, but even Poe never wrote a more gripping tale of terror than Seabury Quinn has penned in *The Isle of Missing Ships,* which will be printed month after next. And in *Stealer of Souls,* coming next month, Charles Hilan Craig has given you an occult story of primitive power, all the more gripping because you feel that it *could* occur, weird and almost incredible though it is. Imagine a town absolutely powerless to prevent four-

teen of its leading citizens paying with their lives, one after another, in agony and crime and torment, at the behest of a little hunchback whose physical body is shut up for life in state's prison—and nothing can be done to stop the fiend. A powerful story, this. And you who like tales of vampires and werewolves, you who have been thrilled by *The Sea Thing* in this issue, will await eagerly Robert E. Howard's terrific werewolf tale *Wolfshead*, for in this tale Mr. Howard writes of werewolves from a viewpoint never before used in literature.

Ghost tales will play an important part in keeping WEIRD TALES unique among magazines. Our recent appeal to our readers for vivid ghost thrillers is bearing rich fruit.

Tales of insects and small animals raised to gigantic size by removal of their growth limitations, as in Paul S. Powers' tale, *The Jungle Monsters* (coming soon), rightfully belong in the class of "highly imaginative tales," although several of our readers criticized us for giving the October cover design to a humorous weird tale of this type (*The Wicked Flea*, by J. U. Giesy).

Perhaps no stories have found such unfailing popularity with you, the readers, as the devil-tales we have printed, as witness the popularity of *Lucifer, Whispering Tunnels, Devil Manor, The Stranger From Kurdistan*, and *The Eternal Conflict*. This latter story, Nictzin Dyalhis' tale of cosmic spaces, of Lucifer and the Shining One, easily led all other stories in the October issue in reader popularity.

E. Hoffmann Price, author of *The Stranger From Kurdistan*, writes of Mr. Dyalhis' story: "*The Eternal Conflict* was a most pleasing glimpse of the occult; I enjoyed it immensely, though I did resent the treatment accorded to Lucifer. As for *The Fading Ghost*, it is surely one of the oddest and most quaint conceptions imaginable, truly bizarre. But enough; suffice it to say that I enjoyed thoroughly the October issue's debauch of weirdness."

Mr. Price has built another tale around Lucifer, and "the stranger from Kurdistan" makes his appearance again in *The Word of Santiago*, which will be published soon.

Harry Reade, of Easton, Pennsylvania, writes to The Eyrie: "WEIRD TALES gets better with every issue. It is the only fiction magazine, of many that I have read, that I haven't tired of after reading copies of one or two issues. *The Eternal Conflict*, by Nictzin Dyalhis, wins my vote for the best story in this issue. Give us more stories by the same author. His *When the Green Star Waned*, in last April's issue, was one of the best and oddest stories published in old friend W. T. since I have been a victim of 'Weird-Taleitis'."

Those of you who read Alanson Skinner's story of Indian witchcraft, *Bad Medicine*, in the October issue, will be saddened to learn of the author's tragic death in an automobile accident near Tokio, North Dakota, on August 17. The car skidded on a slippery road and crashed over an embankment. A moment later, the Rev. Amos Oneroad, a Sioux Indian, dazed and bruised, crawled from the wreck, calling a name, listening for an answer. Then he struggled manfully, but in vain, to lift the mass of steel and release his dearest friend, who lay pinioned and silent beneath it. At length help was found, the car was raised, but it was too late. Alanson Skinner was dead—Alanson Skinner, sympathetic and appreciative friend of the Indian race, learned student of ancient America, prolific author of scientific works on Indian subjects, lecturer, fiction writer, poet. Gone forever was that wonderful memory, that

bubbling humor, that active mind, that radiant, cheerful personality. He was only thirty-nine years old, just getting into his full stride, at the threshold of what promised to be the most brilliant and valuable part of his career. One of his last acts, before he left on the mission that cost him his life, was to send to WEIRD TALES *The Tsantsa of Professor Von Rothapfel,* an eery story of a South American Indian tribe that preserves and shrinks the heads of its dead enemies. This story will be published soon.

Writes Lola Montague, of Roslindale, Massachusetts: "Keep the magazine *weird,* please. Let the weak, spineless creatures who don't like thrills buy other publications that will suit their taste. You are 'the unique magazine.' Remain so. You are the only one of your kind, the last hope of lovers of the awful, the spooky, the occult. Greye La Spina chills me to the marrow of my bones; merciful heaven, how is *The Gargoyle* to end? Nictzin Dyalhis writes with bold, clear strokes of regions into which man dare not even send his thought; *When the Green Star Waned* was a triumph, *The Eternal Conflict* was a masterpiece. Let us have more stories about His Satanic Majesty."

A reader from Passaic, New Jersey, who signs himself S. M. J., asks for "more tales dealing with occultism, astrology, monsters, weird sea tales (as *The Masters From Beyond* and *The Temple),* strange lands, and more semi-scientific tales of startling wonder, also old-fashioned ghost tales that make the readers shudder."

Lieutenant W. J. Stamper, of the Marine Corps, whose powerful Haitain tales have been an admired feature of WEIRD TALES, spent two weeks patrolling the streets of Santa Barbara after the earthquake. "I was conversing with a civilian about 3 a. m. concerning the temblor," he writes, "and he said: 'That morning when the buildings began to tremble and crash to the ground, I thought some of those Chinese birds had been successful in inventing a device whereby they could destroy the world. I read just such a story sometime ago in a magazine called WEIRD TALES.' I think he must have referred to *The Moon Terror,* by A. G. Birch."

Writes Frank W. Jones, of Oak Mill, West Virginia: "I think most of the readers will agree with me when I say we want gruesome, hair-raising, gooseflesh stories, and some old-fashioned ghost stories—the kind the southern negro tells around a watermelon feast at night."

And Miss Vilma La Veene, of St. Joseph, Missouri, writes: "Please give us some more horror tales, the kind that make your spine tingle. I am sure my fellow readers will agree with me in wanting more tales like *Just Bones* in your 1924 Anniversary Issue."

Writes H. E. Phillips, of South Williamsport, Pennsylvania: "Stories by Seabury Quinn, Greye La Spina, H. P. Lovecraft and Robert S. Carr are always good stories. Their signatures alone guarantee their stories."

There is only one way we can know what kind of stories you like, and that is to have you write and tell us which stories make the biggest hit with you, so that we can give you more of the same kind.

If some of the stories dissatisfy you, we want to know which ones, for WEIRD TALES belongs to its readers—it is your magazine, and we want to keep it responsive to your wishes. What is your favorite story in the present issue? Send in your vote to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 408 Holliday Building, Indianapolis, Indiana.

When the Graves Were Opened

(Continued from page 750)

awakened from peaceful rest and ordered to retread the Path of Thorns and Stones which men call Life on Earth.

"Back to the graves whence we came!"

What terrible enthusiasm is this? As though one voice had given an order which must be obeyed, the crowd milled for a moment and was moving away from the city—back toward the cemetery where I had stood for a long moment among the shrouds and cerements at the lips of ravished tombs. They were running now, as though they fled from a pestilence far more deadly than leprosy. I joined them. Once I looked back. I saw the soldier toiling heavily in the rear and knew that he followed to take word of a new miracle back to Pontius Pilate.

Then we were standing in the midst of the graves which had been opened. The great crowd formed a huge circle about Tobias the money-changer. He raised his hands and spoke.

"A miracle brought us back to life. All things are possible to those who believe. A miracle can return us to the place whence we came. Lift up your eyes to the God of Life and pray for the miracle which shall be your deliverance!"

The great crowd knelt as one person, while Tobias, standing proudly erect, gazed with wide-open eyes toward the blue vault which is the sky.

"Jehovah, hear me! Take back, we beseech You, these lives which You have given, for life is long, terrible, and full of sickness and sore trials! I speak for these who, kneeling about me, cry out with their hearts that they be allowed to return again beyond the Veil of Shadows!"

Tobias prayed on, but I was not listening. Even more awed than when I had first seen it, I watched the gathering of that black cloud upon the horizon, a cloud which advanced toward this great burial ground with the swiftness of a charging host. Fiery tongues, tongues of the lightnings, crackled and snapped—those whips again, which I had heard on Golgotha.

Tobias prayed on. None in that vast assemblage of the kneeling noted the rolling cloud which swept, invincible, toward the graves.

The crowd was blotted out as when a heavy fog sweeps down a city street. In a flash of lightning I saw the upturned face of Tobias for a single instant. His eyes were opened wide, and there was an expression of unspeakable joy on his aged face. He held up his arms toward a Man who sat enthroned upon a cloud—a Man who still wore upon his head a Crown of Thorns—whose lips were parted slightly in a gentle smile of benediction. Those tongues of light played swiftly here and there, touching first this one and that one, in view for a fleeting instant only—and I knew that these lights were as one with those which came down out of that other cloud to caress the wounds in the side and limbs of the Christ. I heard a Voice which said:

"What though fathers, sisters, brothers and friends return from the grave, my people still deny me. Thou believest, Tobias, thou and these with thee; therefore is thy prayer answered!"

The cloud disappeared as swiftly as though it had never been—and I was alone in a deserted cemetery!

No, not alone, for fleeing as though for his very life. I saw the soldier en route to the gates of the city, and knew that Pilate would soon be told.

I looked about me once more. The cemetery looked as it had looked just after the graves had been opened, and I knew that the dead had not returned to their graves; but that they had gone when the cloud had gone, and that the Man Whose Face I had seen had called His children home again.

I returned to Pontius Pilate to see what he did when the news came.

He but repeated what he had said at another time:

"Who was this man whom we gave to be crucified?"

I whispered into the ear of Pilate:

"Why do you not wash your hands of all blame?"

He could not have heard me, true; but he beckoned again to one of his officers, and once more I stood by and watched him methodically lave his hands!

What should be the punishment of Pilate? I asked myself this question and made a wish to move up into the future to the deathbed of the Roman governor. I saw him die. I saw his spirit come forth out of his mouth and assume the shadowy outline of a man, even while his subordinates, kneeling at his bedside, bewailed his passing.

The shadowy figure took his position beside a shadow basin, and the ghostly Pontius Pilate began to lave his hands! I watched him for a long time, reading on his face the anguish which must remain there throughout eternity as, until the end of time, he must remain earthbound beside a shadow basin, forever laving his hands to wipe away a stain that may never be cleansed.

I have seen enough, Hesford! Call me back! Call me back! My God! My God! *Why hast Thou forsaken me!*

• • • • • •

I, HARVEY HESFORD, lie in a felon's cell awaiting the end! I have been condemned to the electric chair for the wanton slaying of Jess Gibbons, my dearest friend. The police came into my workshop and found him there in his chair, wires connecting his body with my machine—dead! I tried to explain. But there was the evidence! They would not believe me when I explained that, attempting to recall the soul of Jess Gibbons, I broke something on the machine which I could not replace. Just an accident, it was; but they would not believe.

The above manuscript was prepared by me from the fragmentary notes which, obeying the will of the departed spirit of Jess Gibbons, the lifeless hand of Gibbons wrote upon the paper I had placed before him to receive the revelation. For three days and nights I sat and watched the eery moving of that dead hand as, slowly, it spelled out the words of Jess.

Not all of the above is as Jess wrote it. His notes were written as of the present moment and lacked coherence. I but made his notes over into a connected story, for the purpose of laying the entire matter before the world, hoping that enough people will believe me, and will join in saving me from the chair.

For, after all, is it not punishment enough for me to know that, through my machinations, Jess Gibbons is condemned for nineteen hundred years to stand beside the ghost of Pontius Pilate while the great murderer tries to wash the bloody stains from his hands?

And is that his punishment for a lifetime of blasphemy?

The Tenants of Broussac

(Continued from page 740)

minded me of molten gold in the assayer's crucible, streamed over her shoulders to her waist, one arm was raised in a gesture of absolute abandon while her other hand caressed some object which swayed and undulated before her. Parted in a smile such as Circe, the enchantress, might have worn when she lured men to their ruin, her red lips were drawn back from her gleaming teeth, while she crooned a slow, sensuous melody the like of which I had never heard, nor wish to hear again.

My astounded eyes took this in at first glance, but it was my second look which sent the blood coursing through my arteries like river-water in zero weather. About her slender, virginal torso, ascending in a spiral from hips to shoulders, *was the spotted body of a gigantic snake.*

The monster's horrid, wedge-shaped head swung and swayed a scant half-inch before her face, and its darting, lambent tongue licked lightly at her parted lips.

But it was no ordinary serpent which held her, a laughing prisoner, in its coils. Its body shone with alternate spots of green and gold, almost as if the colors were laid on in luminous paint, its flickering tongue was red and glowing as a flame of fire, and in its head were eyes as large and blue as those of human kind, but set and terrible in their expression as only the eyes of a snake can be.

Scarcely audible, so low his whisper was, de Grandin hissed a challenge as he hurled himself into the chapel with one of his lithe, catlike leaps: *"Snake thou art, Raimond de Broussac, and snake thou shalt become! Garde à vous!"*

With a slow, sliding motion, the great serpent turned its head, gradually released its folds from the leering girl's body and slipped to the floor, coiled its length quickly, like a giant spring, and launched itself like a flash of green-and-gold lightning at de Grandin!

But quick as the monster's attack was, de Grandin was quicker. Like the shadow of a flying hawk, the little Frenchman slipped aside, and the reptile's darting head crashed against the chapel's granite wall with an impact like a wave slapping a ship's bow.

"One!" counted de Grandin in a mocking whisper, and swung his heavy sword, snipping a two-foot length from the serpent's tail as neatly as a sempstress snips a thread with her scissors. *"En garde, fils du diable!"*

Writhing, twisting, turning like a spring from which the tension has been loosed, the serpent gathered itself for another onslaught, its malign, human-seeming eyes glaring implacable hatred at de Grandin.

Not this time did the giant reptile launch a battering-ram blow at its adversary. Instead, it reared itself six feet and more in the air and drove its wicked, scale-armored head downward with a succession of quick shifting jabs, seeking to take de Grandin off his guard and enfold him in its crushing coils.

But like a veritable *chevaux-de-frise* of points, de Grandin's sword was right, left, and in between. Each time the monster's head drove at the little man the blade engraved with the ancient battle cry stood in its path, menacing the hateful blue eyes

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and flashing, backward-curving fangs with its sharp, tapering end.

"Ha, ha!" de Grandin mocked; "to fight a man is a greater task than to bewitch a woman, *n'est-ce-pas, M'sieur le Serpent?*

"Ha! You have it!" Like a wheel of living flame the saintly sword circled through the air, there was a sharp, slapping impact, and the steel sheared clean and clear through the reptile's body six inches behind the head.

"Sa, ha; sa, ha!" de Grandin's face was set in a look of incomparable fury, his small mouth was squared beneath his bristling mustache like that of a snarling wildcat, and the sword blade rose and fell in a quick succession of strokes, separating the writhing body of the serpent into a dozen, twenty, half a hundred sections.

"S-s-sh, no noise!" he cautioned as I opened my lips to speak. "First clothe the poor child's nakedness; her gown lies yonder on the floor."

I looked behind me and saw Adrienne's silk nightrobe lying in a crumpled ring against the altar's lowest step. Turning toward the girl, revulsion and curiosity fighting for mastery of my emotions, I saw she still retained the same fixed, carnal smile, her right hand still moved mechanically in the air as though caressing the head of the loathsome thing yet quivering in delayed death at her white feet.

"Why, de Grandin," I exclaimed in wonder, "why, she's *asleep!*"

"S-s-sh, no sound!" he cautioned again, laying his finger on his lips. "Slip the robe over her head, my friend, and pick her up gently. She will not know."

I draped the silken garment about the unconscious girl, noticing, as I did so, that a long, spiral bruise was

already taking form on her tender flesh.

"Careful, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin commanded, picking up the lantern and sword and leading the way from the chapel. "Carry her tenderly, the poor, sinned-against one. Do not waken her, I beseech you. *Pardieu*, if that scolding mother of hers does but open her shrewish lips within this poor lamb's hearing this night I shall serve her as I did the serpent. *Mordieu*, may Satan burn me if I do not so!"

11

"TROWBRIDGE, Trowbridge, my friend, come and see!" de Grandin's voice sounded in my ear.

I sat up, sleepily staring about me. Daylight had just begun, the gray of early morning still mingled with the first faint rose of the new day, and outside my window the blackbirds were singing.

"Eh, what's up?" I demanded, swinging my feet to the floor.

"Plenty, a very plenty, I do assure you," he answered, tugging delightedly first at one end of his mustache, then the other. "Arise, my friend, arise and pack your bags; we must go, immediately, at once, right away."

He fairly pranced about the room while I shaved, washed and made ready for the journey, meeting my bewildered demands for information only with renewed entreaties for haste. At last, as I accompanied him down the great stairway, my kit bags banging against my knees:

"Behold!" he cried, pointing dramatically to the hall below. "Is it not superb?"

On a couch before the great, empty fireplace of the château hall sat Adrienne Bixby, dressed and ready for a trip, her slender white hands se-

Next Month

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curely held in a pair of bronzed ones, her fluffy golden head pillowed on a broad, homespun-clad shoulder.

"Monsieur Trowbridge," de Grandin almost purred in his elation, "permit that I present to you Monsieur Ray Keefer, of Oklahoma, who is to make happy our so dear Mademoiselle Adrienne at once, right away, immediately. Come, *mes enfants,* we must away," he beamed on the pair of lovers. "The American consul at Rouen, he will unite you in the bonds of matrimony, then—away for that joyous wedding trip, and may your happiness never be less than it is this day. I have left a note of explanation for *Monsieur* your father, *Mademoiselle;* let us hope he gives you his blessing. However, be that as it may, you have already the blessing of happiness."

A large motor was waiting outside, Roxanne seated beside the chauffeur, mounting guard over Adrienne's baggage.

"I did meet Monsieur Keefer as he entered the park this morning," de Grandin confided to me as the car gathered speed, "and I did compel him to wait while I rushed within and roused his sweetheart and Roxanne from their sleep. Ha, ha, what was it *Madame* the Scolding One did say to Roxanne last night, that she should pack her clothes and leave the house bright and early this morning? *Eh bien,* she has gone, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

SHEPHERDED by de Grandin and me, the lovers entered the consulate, emerging a few minutes later with a certificate bearing the great seal of the United States of America and the information that they were man and wife.

De Grandin hunted feverishly in the gutters, finally discovered a tattered old boot, and shied it after them as, with the giggling Roxanne,

they set out for Switzerland, Oklahoma and happiness.

"Name of a little green man!" he swore, furtively flicking a drop of moisture from his eye. "I am so happy to see her safe in the care of the good young man who loves her that I could almost bring myself to kiss that so atrocious Madame Bixby!"

12

"Now, de Grandin," I threatened, as we seated ourselves in a compartment of the Paris express, "tell me all about it, or I'll choke the truth out of you!"

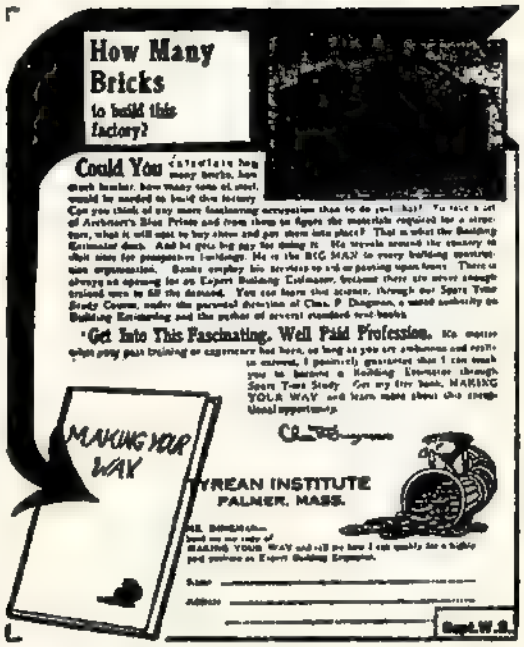
"*La, la,*" he exclaimed in mock terror, "he is a ferocious one, this *Americain!* Very well, then, *cher ami,* from the beginning:

"You will recall how I told you houses gather evil reputations, even as people do? They do more than that, my friend, they acquire character.

"Broussac is an old place; in it generations of men have been born and have lived and met their deaths, and the record of their personalities —all they have dreamed and thought and loved and hated—is written fair upon the walls of the house for him who cares to read. These thoughts I had when first I went to Broussac to trace down the reason for these deaths which drove tenant after tenant from the château.

"But fortunately for me there was a more tangible record than the atmosphere of the house to read. There was the great library of the de Broussac family, with the records of those of it who were good, those who were not so good, and those who were not good at all written down. Among those records I did find this story:

"In the years before your America was discovered there dwelt at



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Broussac one Sieur Raimond, a man beside whom the wickedest of the Roman emperors was a mild-mannered gentleman. What he desired he took, this one, and as most of his desires leaned toward his neighbors' women folk, he was busy at robbery, murder and rapine most of the time.

"*Eh bien*, he was a mighty man, this Sieur Raimond, but the Bishop of Rouen and the Pope at Rome were mightier. At last, the wicked gentleman came face to face with the reckoning of his sins, for where the civil authorities were fearful to act the church stepped in and brought him to his trial.

"Listen to this which I found among the chronicles at the château, my friend. Listen and marvel." He drew a sheaf of papers from his portmanteau and began reading slowly, translating as he went along:

Now when the day for the wicked Sieur Raimond's execution was come, a great procession issued from the church where the company of faithful people were gone to give thanks that earth was to be ridded of a monster.

Francois and Henri, the de Broussac's wicked accomplices in crime, had become reconciled to Mother Church, and so were accorded the mercy of strangling before burning, but the Sieur Raimond would have none of repentance, but walked to his place of execution with the smile of a devil on his false, well-favored face.

And as he marched between the men at arms toward the stake set up for his burning, behold, the Lady Abbess of the convent of Our Lady of Mercy, together with the gentlewomen who were her nuns, came forth to weep and pray for the souls of the condemned, even the soul of the unrepentant sinner, Raimond de Broussac.

And when the Sieur Raimond was come over against the place where the abbess stood with all her company, he halted between his guards and taunted her, saying, "What now, old hen, dost seek the chicks of thy brood who are missing?" (For it was a fact that three novices of the convent of Our Lady had been ravished away from their vows by this vile man, and great was the scandal thereof everywhere.)

Then did the Lady Abbess pronounce these words to that wicked man, "Snake

thou art, Raimond de Broussac, snake thou shalt become and snake thou must remain until some good man and true shall cleave thy foul body into as many pieces as the year hath weeks."

And I, who beheld and heard all, do declare upon the rood that when the flames were kindled about that wicked man and his sinful body had been burned to ashes, a small snake, of the colors of green and gold, was seen by all to emerge from the fire and, maugre the efforts of the men at arms to slay it, did escape to the forest of the chateau of Broussac.

"Eh? What think you of that, Friend Trowbridge?" he asked as he laid the papers beside him on the car seat.

"Rather an interesting medieval legend," I answered, "but hardly convincing today."

"Truly," he conceded, "but as your English proverb has it, where there is much smoke there is apt to be a little flame. Other things I found in the records, my friend. For instance:

"The ashes of this Raimond de Broussac could not be buried in the château chapel among his ancestors and descendants, for the chapel is consecrated ground, and he died excommunicate. They buried him in what was then a pine forest hard by the house where he had lived his evil life, and on the stone which they set over him they did declare that there he lay forever.

"But one year from the day of his execution, as the de Broussac chaplain was reciting his office in the chapel, he did see a green-and-gold snake, something thicker than a monk's girdle but not so long as a man's forearm, enter that chapel, and the snake attacked the holy man so fiercely that he was much put to it to defend himself.

"Another year went by, and a servant bearing oil to refill the sanctuary lamp in the chapel did behold a similar snake, but now grown to the

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length of a man's arm, coiled above one of the tombs, and the snake also attacked that servant, and nearly slew him.

"From year to year the records go on. Often about Broussac was seen a snake, but each succeeding time it appeared larger than before.

"Too, there were strange stories current—stories of women of the locality who wandered off into the woods of Broussac, who displayed strange bruises upon their bodies, and who died eventually in a manner unexplained by any natural cause. One and all, *mon ami*, they were crushed to death.

"One was a member of the de Broussac family, a distant kinswoman of Sieur Raimond himself, who had determined to take the veil. As she knelt at prayer in the chapel one day, a great sleep fell upon her, and after that, for many days, she seemed distrait—her interest in everything, even her religious vocation, seemed to wane to nothing. But it was thought she was very saintly, for those who watched her did observe that she went often to the chapel by night. One morning she was found, like the others, crushed to death, and on her face was the look not of the agony of dying, but the evil smile of an abandoned woman. Even in death she wore it.

"These things I had already read when that gamekeeper brought us news of the great snake he had seen in the garden, and what I had noted down as idle legend appeared possible to me as sober fact—if we could prove it.

"You recall how we spread flour on the chapel floor; you also recall the tracks we read in that flour next day.

"I remembered, too, how that poor Madame Biddle, who went mad in

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912,

Of Weird Tales, published monthly at Indianapolis, Indiana, for October 1, 1925

State of Indiana } ss.
County of Marion }

Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Wm. R. Sprenger, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Weird Tales and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher—Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 408 Holliday Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind.

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Managing Editor—None.

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2. That the owner is: (If the publication is owned by an individual his name and address, or if owned by more than one individual the name and address of each, should be given below; if the publication is owned by a corporation the name of the corporation and the names and addresses of the stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of the total amount of stock should be given).

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5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the six months preceding the date shown above is..... (This information is required from daily publications only.)

WM. R. SPRENGER,
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1925.

ANNA M. MORGAN,
[SEAL] Notary Public.
My commission expires January 26, 1928.

the château Broussac, did so when she wandered one day by chance into the chapel, and I remembered how she does continually cry out of a great snake which seems to *kiss* her. The doctor who first attended her, too, when her reason departed, told me of a bruise, not to be explained, a spiral bruise about the poor lady's arm.

"*Pardieu!* I think I will test these legends some more, and I search and search until I find this wicked Sieur Raimond's grave. It was even as the chronicler wrote, for, to prove it, I made you go with me and read the inscription on the tombstone. *Morbleu!* Against my reason I am convinced, so I make what you called my 'combs' and place them so that their sharp nails would scratch the belly of any snake—if he really were a snake—who tried to crawl over them. *Voilà* next day Mademoiselle Adrienne, she was better. Then I knew for a certainty that she was under the influence of this Sieur Raimond snake, even as that poor intending-nun lady who met so tragic a death in the days of long ago.

"Something else I learn, too. This

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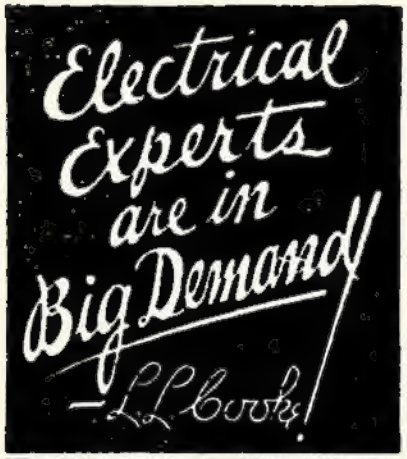

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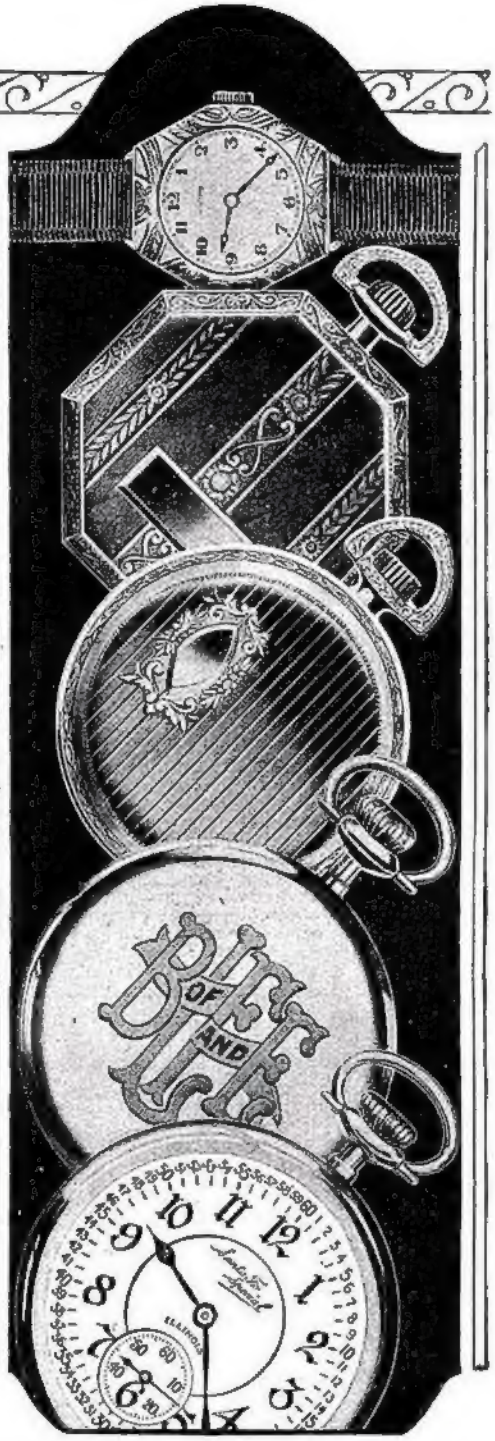

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